FAIRY TALES AND POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

by

Mehrdad Faiz Samadzadeh

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching & Leadership
University of Toronto
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

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The concept of childhood is one of the many facets of modernity that entered Western consciousness in the seventeenth century. It emanated from the historical mutations of the post-Renaissance era that set in motion what Norbert Elias calls the civilizing process, one that spawned a repressive mode of socialization in tandem with the cultural and ideological hegemony of the new power elite. Accordingly, childhood became a metaphor for oppression targeting not only children, but also women, the underclass, the social outcast, and the colonized as they all were deemed “incompletely human”.

From mid-nineteenth century on, however, childhood began to evince a liberating potential in tandem with the changing direction of modern Western civilization. This ushered in an alternative concept of childhood inspired by the shared characteristics between the medieval and modern child that finds expression in the works of distinguished literary figures of the Victorian era. What followed was an entire movement towards the recognition of children’s rights and status that set the context for the growing interest in childhood as a subject of historical inquiry in the twentieth century.

This conceptual vicissitude of childhood is central to the present thesis which I pursue in relation to the literary genre of fairy tale. Such an approach is based on the interplay
of childhood and the fairy tale as they both changed character in accordance with the historical transformations of the period. While the fairy tale was instrumental in the social construction of childhood, the latter on its part played an equally crucial role in altering the narrative structure of the fairy tale. Viewed so, the story of childhood is closely intertwined with the fairy tale, and both with modernity as it changed its focus with the changing direction of the civilizing process. The liberating potential of modernity emerges when a broad spectrum of the marginalized, including children begin to assert themselves and gain recognition as independent subjects of historical inquiry.
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Introduction

The fairy tale and childhood are both independent subjects of historical inquiry which came into their own in the course of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries respectively. Whereas the fairy tale was established with the Brother Grimms’ *Children’s and Household Tales* (1856), childhood was academically recognized with the publication of Philippe Ariès’ provocative book, *Centuries of Childhood* (1962). Ever since, numerous studies have appeared on the two subjects, ranging from psychoanalytical to historical.

What is not fully explored, however, is the interplay of childhood and the fairy tale in a manner both consistent with and opposed to the imperatives of modern discipline. This is evident in the changing concepts of childhood in Western society in different phases of modernity. While until the late nineteenth century the literary construction of childhood for the most part reflected a repressive culture and ideology subservient to the power elite1, thereafter it acquired a liberating potential to redeem not only children but also women, the underclass, the unlettered, and the colonized, just as it had earlier been used as a discourse of domination against the same categories of people. It is at this historical juncture that the medieval and modern concepts of childhood are juxtaposed to present an alternative philosophical view of humanity in keeping with the emancipatory message of modernity.

These are the themes I intend to pursue in this thesis. In doing so, I choose Norbert Elias’ seminal work, *The Civilizing Process* as my theoretical framework. The choice has to do with the overarching nature of his socio-historical approach, which provides a comprehensive account of the epochal changes in Modern Europe. Childhood

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1. There were of course oppositions to this repressive view of childhood as evident in some eighteen century children’s literature concerning educational practices. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft, a staunch advocate of women’s rights, projected a more liberal view of childhood in her *Original Stories: From Real Life: With Conversations, Calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness* (Dublin: printed for J. Jones, No. 111, Grafton-Street, opposite the College, 1792). Relying on her personal experience with real children, she advanced an alternative educational model that tallied with her portrayal of children as having rights and responsibilities to think and to know.
is a cultural manifestation of these changes that was emblematic of diverse forms of social differentiation. Neither the Marxian theory of class nor the Weberian notion of power is adequately equipped to explicate the manner in which childhood came to be associated with the culture of the socially marginalized groups, who, like children, were placed under surveillance. For, beyond class and status there was always the subtlety of intellectual rigour and cultural refinement that gave currency to the superiority of a select few over the rest of society. Although Elias does not directly address the issues of childhood and its metaphorical use against the oppressed, he nevertheless provides us with a perspective to explore them. Ariès’ *Centuries of Childhood* is the logical conclusion of Elias’ main argument, in that he links childhood with modern discipline, intended to enforce standard bourgeois manners. It provides a theoretical perspective to explore the social construction of childhood in the initial phase of modernity. But as we begin to enter the later phase, Ariès’ explication of childhood as the by-product of modern discipline ceases to be of relevance, thus compelling us to explore the existing literature of the period.

The thesis consists of two parts. Part one encompasses the first three chapters which provide historical background to understanding the concept of childhood and the fairy tale. Chapter I begins with a secular initiative in historiography which I view as part of the growing recognition of human agency in history. It brought to the forefront a broad spectrum of socially marginalized groups to demand representation. Within this general context, the notion of the child as historical agent gained currency. Though by no means a unified group in socio-economic terms, children share features and aspirations such as the tendency to break free of social barriers, which characterize them as conceptually unique. At the same time, viewing children as historical subjects opens the path to the recognition within each adult of the repressed child striving to redeem itself. Here, I introduce a particular level of historical agency associated with childhood which is hidden or unconscious, and therefore in need of being unveiled.

Chapter II entails a review of the literature on childhood with the objective to understand the conceptual vicissitude of childhood from the medieval to modern times. I divide the existing literature into two broad categories, that is, cultural constructionism and biological determinism. Cultural constructionism views childhood as a modern
invention arising from a series of events, notably the advent of the print culture, the rising image of the innocent child, and modern schooling, laying the ground for both the image of the innocent child and for a new disciplinary system. Here, the association between childhood and modern discipline, the main thesis of social constructionism, is made evident. Biological determinism, on the other hand, contends that parental care for children is in itself evidence of the existence of childhood as a universal concept true of all ages. Consequently, childhood is treated as a biological reality, solely dependent on the parent-child relationship, and almost immune to socio-cultural influences.

While critiquing both approaches, I incline toward Ariès’ social constructionist view primarily because childhood in its modern sense has been more than a biological entity. It has been the symbolic representation of a system of surveillance, extendable to a whole spectrum of marginalized groups. Hence, childhood by its very definition carried the social connotation of exclusion from active participation in society. But by the same token children are indeed part of a biological entity with certain limitations as compared with adults. This is especially true of their historical agency which is different from that of adults and therefore expressed in an entirely unique fashion.

In Chapter III, I explore some of the major events in modern European history in order to provide a historical background to the changing attitude to childhood as well as the transition from oral to print culture, manifested in a shift from folk tales to fairy tales. Paramount among these events are: the formation of absolutist states leading to the future nation-states, the expansion of trade routes and money economy, the civilizing process, the invention of the printing press, the Reformation and the Counter Reformation, a new scientific and anthropocentric worldview. These processes irreversibly set apart the modern from both the medieval and ancient worlds. The separation is marked by a disruption in the affinity between humankind and the animal kingdom, in the mixing of ages, and in the interplay of the elite and popular cultures, which had been characteristic of pre-modern societies. A new social elite with its predominantly print culture increasingly superseded oral culture. Fairy tales are the literary expression of the changing world that not only echoed the will of an aspiring middle-class, but helped disseminate its moral and cultural values in an indirect and yet powerful manner. In this sense, fairy tales acted more and more as a medium of
socialization, especially as their authors appealed to both parents and children as their target audience.

Part II comprises Chapter IV to Chapter VI which include the analysis of the most popular European fairy tales and the socio-historical context within which they were written and re-written. Chapter IV examines the emergence of fairy tales as a literary genre as well as the manner in which they change character over time. The focus is on the distinctly secular aspect of the genre and its continued relevance, as the narrative structure of the tales shifts from one secular issue to another. I begin with the Venetian Giovan Francesco Straparola (ca 1480-1558?), author of *La Piacevoli Notti (The Pleasant Nights)*, arguably the pioneer of modern fairy tales. His tales were markedly different from any previously written fables or folk tales, in that they conveyed the prospect of a better life for an aspiring middle-class. Such a secular message would have been inconceivable in the pre-modern world of limited upward social mobility. Straparola’s rag-to-riches stories captures this secular message, which point to social change in general and the erosion of old privileges in particular.

This secular aspect permeates the works of later authors as they engage with the most urgent issues of their time. The fairy tales and *contes de fée* of Madame d’Aulnoy (1650/1651-1705), a dissident French aristocrat, bear witness to this continuity, except that the emphasis shifts to the refinement of manners. Here, upward social mobility is licenced through civility and virtue as they became a mark of noble status. This is d’Aulnoy’s weapon of choice against the patriarchal system, by which she exercises her influence as a female over the course of the civilizing process. Hence, in almost all of d’Aulnoy’s stories, courteous males appearing as animals or as poor individuals ultimately emerge as real princes. By the same token, the female protagonists who appear to be virtuous, moralistic, and kind-hearted turn out to be displaced or bewitched princesses.

The magic tales of Charles Perrault (1628-1703) were radically different, both in orientation and narrative structure from Madam d’Aulnoy’s. To be sure, they, too, focused on the refinement of manners in tandem with the civilizing process predominantly perceived from the male perspective. At its core lay the imperative to
submit to the monopolistic nature of state apparatus, as symbolized in the authority of a male figure. As such, Perrault’s tales were instrumental in promoting the modern concept of childhood as his psychogenetic exertions on young minds gave rise to a new mode of socialization aimed at altering them in accordance with the ideological imperatives of the nation-state. Its objective was to instil in children at an early age moral and cultural values appropriate for obedience to both parental and state authority. To this end, Perrault’s fairy tales heralded a new mode of socialization.

Perrault’s magic tales, it must be stressed, were designed for children of the elite and not for those of the poor and the underclass. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the nation was far from being all-encompassing. It required the French Revolution and later the German nationalist experience to include the multitude in the concept of the nation, a process that was generalized across Europe with mass political participation.

Chapter V begins with an overview of German history in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century to provide a historical background to the fairy tales of the Grimm Brothers. In Germany, the quest for cultural identity and national unity brought together diverse social groups and classes around a commonly shared language, thus setting the tone for the multi-class character of German nationalism. Here, language represented a common cultural patrimony as the most distinctive feature of nationhood that encompassed all those living within its linguistic and geographical boundaries. The role of folkloric traditions was of crucial importance in the creation of this linguistically expressed ethnic nationalism which was rooted in the primordial existence of the German nation.

The same role was assigned to fairy tales, in particular the Grimms’ Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children’s and Household Tales), with the added function of setting the cultural and moral standards in the age of the modern nation-state. In this sense, the idealized harmony of the golden past was both congruent with and aspiring to a united, liberal-democratic Germany. Given the universal appeal of the Grimms’ fairy tales as a powerful medium of socialization, Germany became an all-encompassing model of nationalism.
If Charles Perrault’s fairy tales were to disseminate the dominant codes of conduct among the aristocratic circles, those of the Grimms were to spread them beyond the elite. Not only did the Grimms’ fairy tales help promote the cause of German national unity, but they also succeeded in setting the stage for the universal acceptance of bourgeois cultural priorities as national ideology. In performing such tasks, the Grimms were aided by the institution of modern schooling that gave their collection of tales a universal appeal beyond the elite throughout the continent. Viewed in this light, the assimilation of the bourgeois culture by the popular classes was more wilful than coerced.

The notion of an authentic German national identity, culture and ideology, all perceived as pure and natural, blossomed with the image of the child firmly lodged in the popular imagination. The child became the primordial example of an imagined nation and the microcosm of a real one aspiring to excel in its cultural and moral endeavours. This corresponded to a Romantic concept of childhood that was neither the exclusive by-product of a myth of national origin, nor limited in its scope and application to a specific age group. Hence, childhood, though seemingly a virtuous and much valued concept, served a repressive culture and ideology that excluded all those whose eccentric behaviour or distinct identity would divest the nation of its cultural purity, or children of their childlike qualities. The latter were placed under surveillance as the image of the innocent child gained currency, an image that had to be preserved through a strict medium of socialization.

In Chapter VI, I explore an emerging alternative view of childhood against its projected image by a predominantly adult/male elite. This is an area where the liberating potential of modernity begins to assert itself at different levels. I demonstrate this by analysing selected works by such literary figures as Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, and Mark Twain, who radically depart from the Romantic notion of childhood. Dickens’ *David Copperfield* offers a distinctly novel concept of childhood. It is a significantly enlarged concept that brings to the fore the child of poverty, while at the same time representing a mixture of the medieval and modern view of childhood. Dickens’ child of fiction is a labouring child with middle class aspirations, who shares the adult qualities of the medieval child as well as the childlike characteristic of the
modern child. It is also a child hero who in his struggle to break free of the repressive world of adults is entrusted with the task of redeeming women, the underclass, and the socially marginalized groups.

Next is an interpretation of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* from historical and philosophical perspectives. It is a turning point in the history of childhood as it marks a significant break with the Romantic image of the child. The break is manifested in Alice’s personal attitudes towards the anomaly of Wonderland and the orderly structure of the real world she descends from, both of which immensely shape her perception of herself as a child. This takes the form of a new adult-child economy that on the one hand recognizes the adult qualities in a child, and on the other instils childlike characteristics in adults. Alice is the personification of this phenomenon in Carroll’s imagination; she not only mediates between the medieval and modern concepts of childhood, but also by virtue of being a female redeems women and ultimately humanity.

I then engage in a discussion of George MacDonald’s *The Light Princess*. It is a short but important literary work, because the focus is entirely on the experience of female children whose sense of oppression is specific to their sexual identity. MacDonald reveals a particular facet of the Victorian morality, disseminated through an early socialization scheme, which is both repressive and exclusionary with respect to young girls. He redresses the problem by treating it as an anomaly that can only be combatted by breaking free of the emotional and sexual inhibitions imposed on women. Such a remedy is therapeutic, for the moment *The Light Princess* asserts her sexuality, her lost gravity is restored, and this further helps her revitalize her repressed desires and emotions.

I end the chapter with a review of Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* which presents an alternative to the dominant mode of socialization in late nineteenth-century American society. The focus is on the concept of adolescence and the element of class which the author brings to the equation; Twain’s heroic character, who initiates the alternative, is a poverty-stricken adolescent. His escape from the rigid environment within which he is placed opens the path to a mixed concept of
childhood, which is as much medieval as it is modern. Novels of this nature, though seemingly unrelated to the general theme of this thesis, are of relevance in creating a healthy environment within which fantasy and imagination prevails over violence. In this sense, the novel functions just as another form of fairy tale for particular age groups beyond target-audience for fairy tales, including adults, who re-experience the magical effect of their lost fairyland through an entirely different path.

If then for much of the modern period childhood functioned as a metaphor of oppression, in the post-Romantic era, it underwent a major transformation in tandem with the assertion of its agency. This coincided with the onset of a new phase of modernity characterized by the redemptive potential of the oppressed and their historical subjectivity. Philosophically speaking, this corresponds to what Jürgen Habermas calls “The Unfinished Project of Modernity”, marked by the resurgence of the hitherto excluded on the political and historical arena. It signals a shift of emphasis to a more anthropocentric notion of civilization that goes beyond the state monopoly of violence to allow for peace and harmony within and between states. This concurs with Elias’ preferred notion of civilization and is the context within which childhood as a redemptive force finds expression.

This redemptive potential of childhood is further explored in the epilogue with reference to J.D. Salinger’s 1951 novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*. Here, the youthful subversive tendency is directed against the ideological basis of the power elite. In this sense, childhood becomes a measure of authenticity against the ‘phony’ world of adults, a world shaped by the cultural and ideological imperatives of modern Western civilization. Quite clearly, *the Catcher* acts as the most vocal critique of Western culture and civilization, and in some ways is the logical outcome of Elias’ transcendental view of civilization as seen from the perspective of a mid-twentieth century adolescent. The call for equal rights and harmony, and the redefinition of civilization in a manner consistent with giving expression to spontaneity and animal instincts are some of the most important themes underlying Elias’ concept of civilization, which I shall discuss.

Finally, notice should be taken that literary sources used in this thesis are far from being exhaustive. By no means have I tried to produce an extensive historical
survey of children’s literature. Such an undertaking would be beyond the scope of the present research project. Instead, I have selected a number of literary works which I believe are most representative of the socio-historical trends and processes with respect to the vicissitude of childhood and the changing character of the fairy tale within the broader context of the civilizing process.
Part 1: Conceptualized Childhood
Chapter I: The Child as a Historical Subject

The Birth of a Secular Mind

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche recites the story of a madman who, while crying incessantly, addresses an atheist crowd:

> Whither is God. I will tell you. We have killed him - you and I. All of us are his murderers…Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us- for the sake of this deed, he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto.¹

The story suggests the coming of an era in which the loyalty of the individual is neither to God nor to an eternal moral law, but to man’s own skilful initiative in mastering the world. It also signifies the emergence of a secular worldview that aims to free the human subject from the shadow of an ecclesiastical interpretation of historical events. The withering of God, as epitomised in the collective act of His murder, is the metaphor for a trans-valuation of history whose notion of causality is no longer attributed to the divine intervention, but to the role of human agency. The madman is both the personification of the very era he ushers in and the harbinger of its historical consciousness.

This was the process that began with the Renaissance, facilitated by the scientific and industrial revolutions, and came to fruition with the Age of Enlightenment and social revolutions in Europe during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not only did it create the foundations for a secular worldview, but it also set the trend for novel concepts of man as sovereign. Thenceforth, human beings were no longer viewed as inept subjects but as freeborn individuals, with natural rights and the will to shape

their own destiny. This secular worldview found expression in the political philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that advocated the idea of individual rights and limited government.

Yet, the image of human being as a universal actor on political and historical arenas was far from complete. The reason for this oversight may be sought in the nature of the new political philosophy that left too many excluded from actively participating in the political process. While it assigned a significant role to the economic and political elite, it denied representation to the proletariat, the peasantry, women and the underclass. It was ironic that the liberal theory of government that called for the emancipation of man from tyranny served to establish the ideological supremacy of the triumphant bourgeoisie.

Historical Causality and the Assertion of the Working-Class

The disparity in the treatment of different social classes had its ramification in the notion of historical causality. Not divine intervention, but the perceived personality of leading figures explained past and present events. History was congruent with the vigour of the new political elite framed by a secular discourse. The scientific spirit of the Enlightenment and the ensuing positivist philosophy that dominated the nineteenth century elevated this liberal view of history to the status of an academic discipline. It was marked by the rise of documentary history that focused almost entirely on the articulate and politically influential as proper subjects of historical enquiry. According to this new concept, history was the product of rational political action by those few capable of it and others had no role whatsoever to play in the past and the present.

The representation of the inarticulate was a later phenomenon that entailed a new awareness on the part of the oppressed of their political and historical agency. This is again prophesied by the madman when he declares: “I have come too early. My time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men.”

The madman’s declaration unmistakably speaks of the redemptive

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potential of modernity, a whole new era of human consciousness that comes in successive stages. Each stage is delineated by the social impulses it generates, thereby setting the context for the assertion of yet another oppressed category of people.

This is precisely what Jürgen Habermas regards as the expansion of “the public sphere” from an exclusively bourgeois domain to “a public body,” a shift that underlies his philosophical view of modernity as an “incomplete” or “unfinished project”. Surely enough, Habermas’ point of departure is cultural modernity that originated in the Renaissance and advanced through “[t]he progressive differentiation of science and knowledge, morality and art… “, leading to “both the specialized treatment of special domains and their detachment from tradition.” But such a move towards specialization and rationalization has, in effect, boosted “avant-garde art” to “supposedly penetrate the values of everyday life and thus infected the lifeworld with modernist mentality.” From this perspective, modernism for Habermas “represents a great seductive force, promoting the dominance of the principle of unrestrained self-realization, the demand for authentic self-experience, the subjectivism of an overestimated sensibility…” This is in keeping with his overall belief, inherited from the Enlightenment philosophers, that “the relentless development of the objectivating sciences, of the universalistic foundations of morality and law, and of autonomous art…would “further the understanding of self and world, the progress of morality, justice in social institutions…”

It is noteworthy that in Habermas’ view of modernity the public sphere (Öffentlichkeit) plays a crucial role, but in explicating its expansion, he lays more emphasis on structures of linguistic/rational communication or purposeful speech act than manifest political action. His notion of the public sphere is essentially a free domain where individual citizens from various social backgrounds enter and “behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions –

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3. Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere”, New German Critique no. 3 (Autumn, 1974), 49.
about matters of general interest.” Such an understanding of the public sphere presumes, as Geoff Eley notes, “the prior transformation of social relations, their condensation into new institutional arrangements and the generation of new social, cultural and political discourses around this changing environment.”

Philosophically, it all sounds logical, but historically, it remains to be substantiated, for modernity appeared, first and foremost, as an elitist cultural project that worked towards the exclusion of the outcast and the underclass. Modernity as an all-inclusive concept beyond cultural reproduction was a later event that began to emerge in the nineteenth century, largely but not exclusively, as a result of the political initiative of the excluded.

Nevertheless, Habermas’ view of modernity as “an unfinished project”, constantly evolving under new social impulses, is historically valid. Politically, it is seen in a series of movements that erupted in Europe from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century onwards, all demanding social justice and representation. The assertion of the working-class, beginning with the Chartist movement, was an important historical initiative in transcending the emancipatory language of modernity. Not only did it expand the scope of political participation, but it radically altered the liberal concept of man.

What’s more, the call for representation by the bulk of the unrepresented had a direct impact on the way in which they perceived themselves as historical agents. It was no coincidence that between the 1790s and the 1850s there emerged a whole range of working class autobiographies which revealed a new class identity that “took its initial step towards self-consciousness”, and ultimately “towards emancipation.” As David Vincent points out, such autobiographies were often “an attack on the established body of written history” and were “a major change in the way in which working men and

5. Habermas, “The Public Sphere”, 49.
women began viewing their past.”7 This new awareness of the past inspired by the present can only be ascribed to the rising tide of modernity which in its most vigorous form is accounted for by E. P. Thompson in his seminal work, *The Making of the English Working Class*.

Thompson embarks on a project of history from below by basing his exploration on the Marxian model of emancipation which, in contrast with the liberal theory of man, is more in tune with the madman’s prediction in Nietzsche’s story. Here, the objective is to subvert Lenin’s theory of vanguard party by showing that “workers were capable of formulating and acting on revolutionary ideas.”8 For whereas class to him is “a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events”9, it is at the same time closely tied to the notion of historical agency. To this end, Thompson departs from economic determinism to allow for the transcendence of the social being to the level of consciousness, thereby extending agency to the entire working class. This denotes freeing consciousness not only from its dependence on the determinism of the base/superstructure model, but also from its dependence on the intellectual elite. Characteristically, *The Making of the English Working Class* aims at revitalizing a tradition which, in the words of Fredric Jameson, is “retold within the unity of a single great collective story”, that shares “a single fundamental theme - for Marxism, the collective struggle to wrest a realm of freedom from a realm of necessity.”10

Yet, *The Making of the English Working Class*, though originally a response to the elitist view of history, did not entirely break with it. While it invested individuals engaged in the revolutionary act with absolute importance, the rest, beyond the pale of class, were of little or no significance. The problem lies in Thompson’s perception of historical change as arising in large part from class consciousness, a perception that leads

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him to equate an entire movement with the actions of a few politically conscious individuals.\textsuperscript{11} Such a methodological restriction certainly hinders any glimpses, on his part, into the bulk of the inarticulate who constituted the core of the movement, and yet are excluded from Thompson’s historical account. The result, as Geoff Eley points out, is “a grand inference from the actions of an articulate radical minority to the implied solidarity of the skilled trades and beyond to the ascribed consciousness of the working class at large.”\textsuperscript{12}

Thompson’s categorization of the actors of the 1790s into revolutionary crowd and conservative mob, based on revolutionary and rational preferences, is equally limiting and exclusionary. This is indicative of his own ideological prejudice that tends to see the irrationality of mob politics as being inconsequential to the course of events. There is of course no comparison between the two political currents in their cultural orientation, but it is to be noted that historical causality operates independent of value judgement. More often than not hostile acts against a revolutionary idea can lead to its popularization, as was the case in 1791, when a group of rioters destroyed Dr. Priestley’s library, and yet they called themselves “free-born Englishmen”.\textsuperscript{13} Thompson seems to forget that ‘men make their own history, but they do not know that they are making it.’\textsuperscript{14}

Moreover, Thompson’s preoccupation with class as an all-encompassing category of historical analysis leads him to omit other forms of binary opposition. One such omission is that of gender as the concept of class becomes articulated through a shared masculine experience. At the heart of it lies a close association between productivity and masculinity that places women outside the boundaries of class, a presumption that effectively marginalizes their political existence. This is yet another theoretical shortcoming in Thompson’s exposition that precludes him from what Joan Scott calls “redefining and enlarging traditional notions of historical significance.”

\textsuperscript{11} Thompson, \textit{The Making…}, 59.
\textsuperscript{12} Eley, “Edward Thompson…”, 26.
\textsuperscript{13} Thompson, \textit{The Making…}, 85.
\textsuperscript{14} This is Levi-Straus’s narration of Marx’s famous statement, which is cited by Carlo Ginzburg in his co-written article, “The Name and Game: Unequal Exchanges and the Historiographic Marketplace” in \textit{Microhistory and the Lost People of Europe}, eds. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, trans. Eren Branch (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 4.
Hence, The Making of the English Working-Class, as Joan Scott further notes, remains “preeminently a story about men, and class is, in its origin and its expression, constructed as a masculine identity, even when not all the actors are male.” Thompson confirms this assertion when he describes women’s role as being “confined to giving moral support to the men, making banners, and caps of liberty which were presented with ceremony at reform demonstration, passing resolutions and addresses, and swelling the numbers at meetings.”

This elitist/masculine view of history had its origins in classical Marxism, which itself reflected the mentality of the age, but was challenged soon after the publication of Thompson’s seminal work. The problem was, first and foremost, rooted in the Marxian belief in the liberating potential of the proletarian ideology that bestowed upon it a scientific halo to the level of absolute knowledge. It was the possession of this knowledge that granted the entire working-class the role of historical agency. Practically, however, only a select few, by virtue of their intellectual ability, could predict and influence the course of events. This alone accorded them a privileged status over the entire working-class, so that the action of the masses was significantly sidelined. Lenin’s theory of vanguard party was the height of this elitist attitude. His dictum that “class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without” speaks to the point. In his argument against economic determinism, Lenin further points out: “the strength of the present-day movement lies in the awakening of the masses (principally, the industrial proletariat) and that its weakness lies in the lack of consciousness and initiative among the revolutionary leaders.”

The attribution of historical agency to the proletariat remained only at a theoretical level; but even so it was problematic. Its portrayal as a universal liberating force inevitably swept aside other groups and categories. As Mark Poster notes, “by totalizing the social field in terms of the universal suffering of wage labor, Marx at the

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15. Scott, Gender and the Politics..., 29, 72.  
same time effected a closure which prevents other modes of domination from being named and analyzed.” Marx explained this in the following terms:

The emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the political form of the emancipation of the workers; not that their emancipation alone was at stake but because the emancipation of the workers contained universal human emancipation.

Needless to say, such a totalizing vision of society also had its impact on the past. If history came to mean the struggle of one class against another, those not quite fitting into either class had no historical role to play. It left many voices unheard: women, the underclass, and the outcast. Apart from its ideological orientation, the Marxian version of historical narrative did not radically break with that of its liberal predecessor. It, too, assigned historical agency to prominent figures endowed with political vision and intellectual vigour. This is no surprise that the history of the working class was often identified with the history of the oppressed, and that it consisted mostly of the literature on the thoughts and actions of the revolutionary leaders. The history of the oppressed, including that of the working class, was yet to be written – a task that was undertaken in the immediate aftermath of *The Making of the English Working Class*.

**Modernity and the Expansion of the Notion of the Historical Subject**

Jean Paul Sartre once remarked: “There is no given freedom”, and that “the freedom to which the author invites us is not a pure abstract consciousness of being free.” To him, freedom is “the movement by which one perpetually uproots and liberates oneself”. It is crystalized in a book that serves as “a go-between” to establish “a historical contact among the men who are steeped into the same history and who likewise contribute to its making.” Hence, freedom can only “wins itself in a historical situation”, in that “each

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book proposes a concrete situation on the basis of a particular alienation.” It is also an infinite concept, which “like the sea”, has “no end to it.”

Sartre’s view of freedom entails an account of modernity that tallies with Habermas’ interpretation of it as “an unfinished project”. Here too, the redemptive potential of modernity operates in successive stages, as the assertion of one category of the oppressed leads to that of another. This is in fact characteristic of a multivalent movement that has in recent past brought to the forefront new players, who, in the words of Dorothy Smith, entered history as both “knowers and actors.” The movement is a true embodiment of the new phase of modernity and as such geared towards the democratization of history. For one thing, in their struggle for political representation and social justice, the players have often construed their own historical narrative, thus widening the notion of the historical subject. This clearly has had its impact on contemporary political and historical perspectives, to the extent that “the marginal”, to use George Yudice expression, “is no longer peripheral but central to all thought”, for;

by deconstructing that the ‘marginal’ constitute the condition of possibility of all social, scientific, and cultural entities, a new ‘ethics of marginality’ has emerged that is necessarily decentered and plural, and that constitutes the basis of a new, neo-Nietzschean ‘freedom’ from moral injunctions.

The Emergence of Childhood as an Historical Subject
Yet, this dialectical relationship between the politics of marginality and the changing nature of the Humanities and Social Sciences set the context for the advent of childhood as an historical subject. Leena Alanen describes the process as part of the growing “modern (Western) concerns about individuality and the rights of individuals, now being

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extended to children.” Goran Therborn advances a similar view as he expounds the process in terms of an “uneven and multilinear development of egalitarian individualism” which opens the path for “the emancipation of children.” In much the same way, Elizabeth Nasman sees the changing social attitude to childhood in the context of a new trend towards “individualization”. All these perspectives converge in what David Kennedy calls a “philosophy of persons” which came in the wake of a radical change in the contemporary philosophical landscape. The change was particularly embodied in “a tentative subjectivity”, which was “influenced by and in turn influencing the accelerating transformations of modernism” as manifested in “the ever-increasing intervisibility of cultures on a planetary scale.” It emerged at a moment in the history of the field when the critique of Western metaphysics is paralleled by the critique of white adult male hegemony in the philosophical tradition and by an opening to “voices from the margins,” including those of women and of non-Western forms of knowledge.

Kennedy’s exposition is a testimony to Habermas’s view of modernity as “an unfinished project”, but it is also indicative of a shift of emphasis in the civilizational discourse that gives expression to the subjectivity of childhood. After all, the invention of childhood as a metaphor for oppression in the early modern period and its emergence as an independent entity in recent times fall within the matrix of modern Western civilization. Norbert Elias’s seminal work, *The Civilizing Process*, provides a broad theoretical framework within which childhood and its vicissitudes can be explored. This

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is especially relevant as he speaks of two different types of civilization: one which is characterized by the state monopoly of violence in a bid to impose rules of conduct, and the other based on peace and harmony within and between states. While almost all of Elias’s two-volume work is devoted to the former, i.e., the reformation of manners, civility and the power structure, his concluding remarks entail a comprehensive discussion of the latter. To him, the frontiers of civilization transcends state regulation of human conduct and encompass voluntary avoidance of violence and mutual respect among individual members of society. As he points out:

At present many of the rules of conduct and sentiment implanted in us as an integral part of one's conscience, of the individual super-ego, are remnants of the power and status aspirations of established groups, and have no other function than that of reinforcing their power chances and their status superiority.\(^{28}\)

Elias then adds:

…if the co-existence of men with each other, which after all is the condition of the individual existence of each of them, functions in such a way that it is possible for all those bonded to each other in this manner to attain this balance, then and only then can humans say of themselves with some justice that they are civilized.\(^{29}\)

But how does one situate childhood and its changing character within Elias’s broad theoretical framework, especially as neither of his two volumes deals directly with children? The answer may be deduced from Philippe Ariès’ *Centuries of Childhood*, in which childhood is placed within the matrix of modern Western civilization. This is evident in the way he poses the question: “It will be no surprise to the reader if these questions [the changing nature of family] take us to the very heart of the great problems of civilization, for we are standing on those frontiers of biology and sociology from which mankind derives its hidden strength.”\(^{30}\) Though fraught with some methodological

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weakness, Ariès’ historical account of childhood as a concept emerging out of modern discipline is in fact the logical conclusion of the initial phase of the civilizing process. It set in motion a new mode of socialization, which not only rendered children the subject of systematic surveillance, but also invoked the child’s image as a metaphor of oppression for the subjugation of women, the underclass, and the social outcast.

Such an association between childhood and modern discipline is representative of the French intellectual tradition of the 1960s, of which Foucault was an influential figure. There is in fact a parallel between what Ariès says of the role of discipline in the rise of the modern concept of childhood and what Foucault presents as scientific discourses of domination. Both are essentially technologies of power which are advanced by the power elite and imposed on the underclass, women, and children. But whereas Foucault has shown this technology in relation to the socially outcast, Ariès has done so in relation to children. As Martin Hoyles notes: “The control of children in schools can be compared with the control of inmates in prisons, patients in hospitals or people considered to be mad. All these groups are treated like children.”

The comparison is well illustrated by what M D Hill wrote when in 1855 he referred to the problem of delinquency:

> The delinquent is a little stunted man- he knows much and a great deal too much of what is called life- he can take care of his own immediate interests. He is self-reliant, he has long directed or misdirected his own actions and has so little trust in those about him that he submits to no control and asks for no protection. He has consequently much to unlearn- he has to be turned again into a child.

Yet, Ariès ceases to be of relevance when the liberating potential of childhood begins to reveals itself from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. It takes the form of a revolt against the elite male/adults, who had not only denied children equal rights but also had marginalized a host of other groups. This was a crucial moment in the

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history of western civilization since the emphasis now began to shift from the reformation of manners to the language of rights. These are the themes that I shall pursue in the ensuing chapters with a view to understanding the changing character of childhood as a social construct. But let us first address the question as to whether children can be viewed as historical subjects.

**Children as an Age Group**

Historically, children have not constituted a uniform group, nor has the history of childhood, as Bernhard Jensen imagines, “fulfilled the same functions with regard to establishing forms of collective identity as has been the case with, for instance, feminist history.” The question becomes more poignant when Furstenberg speaks of “the heterogeneity of children’s experiences,” whereby he criticizes a falsely perceived notion that attributes to childhood “a common experience” and a “common form” in all societies and at all times.

The answer lies in liberation from the influence of positivist social science, which, as John R. Gillis observes, reduces children to “an essentially passive object of institutional changes, without voice, face or a history of their own.” The need for this liberation is emphasized by Valerie Polakow who, like Gillis, sees the passive image of contemporary childhood as the by-product of “the epistemological universe of positivism.” Pointing out the methodological deficiencies of a positivist epistemology, she notes how “the ‘scientific’ idea of childhood pieced together from fragmented atomized components of the child’s existential being, thereby giving currency to “a reductionistic and degraded image of the child.”

That the modern institution of childhood deprives children of their “history-making power”, viewing them instead as “a functional category for oppression”, is, in

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Polakow’s assessment, attributable to the human events, i.e., “the false dichotomies of science—of thought from action, emotion from reason, subject from object…” To overcome this degraded image of childhood, she calls for a new epistemology that sees the child not as “a deculturated, isolated monad, existing in ahistorical relationship to his era,” but as “living in culture, in language, and makes history together with other human beings.”

What Polakow criticizes here has for the most part found expression in some anthropological fields, which Charlotte Hardmen attacks for viewing children “as passive objects” and “helpless spectators,” who only assimilate, learn and respond to adults, “having little autonomy, contributing nothing to social values or behaviour except the latent outpourings of earlier acquired experience.”

The Political View of Childhood

Such an epistemology entails a hermeneutics of childhood, which renders it a unique status in the realm of historical agency. The interpretation takes into consideration cultural differences in the historically unique but socially varied experience of childhood. Thus, rather than being just an offshoot of democratic movements, the interest in childhood has also been, in Martin Hoyles’ view, a result of children’s agency. As Allison James and Alan Prout, state: “children can no longer be regarded as simply the passive subjects of structural determinations,” but as “people to be studied in their own right, and not just as receptacles of adult teaching.”

Similarly, as Jens Qvortrup maintains, children are themselves “co-constructors of childhood and society,” and this emanates from their interaction and communication with “nature, society, and other people—both adults and peers.” The incentive here is the categorization of childhood and the experience of children

themselves as a minority group, a theme that has again been elaborated by Qvortrup. Basing his approach on Louis Wirth’s definition of the term minority, i.e., “the exclusion from full participation in the life of society”41, he essentially views childhood as:

one which is defined in relation to its corresponding dominant group with higher social status and greater privileges, i.e. in this case the adults; and furthermore one, which because of physical or cultural characteristics is singled out of society for different and unequal treatment.42

This view of childhood entails a revision of the notion that limits historical agency to the direct and rationally conscious acts of the human adult, a notion that obscures children’s role in the historical process. The obscurity stems from what Jens Qvortrup considers to be “a secular trend among adults”, which in political terms gives “priority to other factors of life in our modern society than to childhood.”43 This reflects an androcentric model of sociological theory which, in Alanen’s observation, “has been written and rewritten, always presuming everyone to be adult.”44

Any attempt at retrieving the historical role of children from obscurity involves an appreciation of the difference between adults’ and children’s forms of politics. Jens Qvortrup’s statement is quite apposite: “As long as we see the actions of little children through the models of our shared adult conventionality, we are not likely to see the world as children, in their own uniqueness, see it.”45 Further, in his search for children’s praxis, Jens Qvortrup focuses on the nature of children’s acts as distinct from those of adults, thus concluding that children “are not active in the way in which adults are active.”46 It is therefore by recognizing such a difference between the two age categories, and by capturing children’s specific ways of responding to situations, that one can interpret their

42. Qvortrup, “Nine Theses about Childhood …”, 18.
43. Qvortrup, “Nine Theses about Childhood …”, 12.
44. Alanen, “Gender and Generation…”, 31
actions as carrying significant political and historical connotations. Viewed in this context, one can see, as does Polakow, that:

…the growing child is an intentional actor constructing a life project with consciousness, that becoming in the world involves a dynamic self-representation, that the child too is a historical being, a maker of history, a meaning-maker involved in praxis upon the world.47

Yet, the nature of children’s discourse is not self-evident, since children (in contrast to adults) resort to ways of communication, which are often concealed and less consciously directed. The reason for this lies in children’s action containing a symbolic element that relates to the realm of fantasy and imagination. Moreover, children’s political manoeuvre targets those areas and institutions, which, though seemingly apolitical, contain considerable residues of political influence. Hence, their symbolic act needs to be decoded for its full implications to emerge. Once decoded, their “purposeful actions”, in the words of Marx Wartofski, elevate children to the level of “innovative creators.”, capable of initiating changes.48 As Ashis Nandy points out, young children in particular “do not often have the option of breaking out of the social and educational ‘traps’ set for them”, but instead attempt to subvert the authoritarian world of adults at the level of symbolic language. Nandy also refers to children’s imaginative power as ‘terror of childhood’ which he interprets as a form of political discourse, since they constantly present “a persistent, living, irrepressible criticism of our ‘rational’, ‘normal’, ‘adult’ visions of desirable societies.”49

Examples of this symbolic form of action may be found in the structure of children’s games, for nowhere is this role of historical agency in children so manifestly present than in children's play. For one thing, play is, in Melanie Klein’s account, “the child’s most important medium of expression” where his/her “conscious is as yet in close

47. Polakow, The Erosion of Childhood, 36.
contact with its unconscious.” It is also where “the tyranny of means and ends is broken, and causality gives way to synchronicity”, thereby implying “a different subject-object, self-world, inner-outer relationship.”

The same principle holds true of the act of telling and retelling of stories by children. In this case, children’s play and their manipulation of the narrative structure of the stories related to them, in Alison Laurie’s observation, “tell us more about childhood than the creation of an implied child in critical theory.”

Using their visual and textual imagery, children read, interpret, and write stories in order to give meaning to the world, an act that is both subversive and liberating.

This subversive and liberating tendency in children’s games and stories is more often than not manifested in a binary opposition between children and adults, whose areas of operation are primarily within the family and school. In reality, however, this is an act of resistance on the part of children against the dominant mode of socialization responsible for the transmission of a particular culture. This is where the role of children’s agency comes into play, for children, as Douglas Sturm points out, “are not merely a neutral stuff to be shaped and moulded through socialization,” but they are also intentional actors “constructing a life project with consciousness”, which involves “a dynamic self-representation.”

Because it is in this particular area of children’s life that ‘the formation and re-moulding’ of their identity as a definite group occurs. It is also in this area that children’s opposition to the authoritarian world of adults becomes a history-making event.

From this perspective, it is essential that we include in our historical analysis what Bernhard Jensen calls the ‘new fundamental category of socialization’. Yet, we

must be cognizant of the fact that the effect that children’s agency produce here is not immediately felt. It takes generation after generation to leave its mark on society; but when it does, it is most visibly manifested in social attitudes toward childhood. In this respect, it is important to specify what is meant by children’s agency, if we are to arrive at a reasonably comprehensive view of their historical contribution. The term agency, as I use it in this context, denotes the manner in which children’s reconstruction of the world through fantasies and imagination alters the adults’ perception of them. In this way, it changes the adults’ self-perception, forcing them to recognize ‘the child within’, a child who, in the words of Jonathan Fineberg, is “necessarily buried by the conventions of adult socialization”, but who now “exercises potent influence on the entire range of the adult’s behaviour.”

This change in perception is of crucial importance here, because the child is no longer looked upon solely as an object of social control but as a person who is as much predisposed to break free of oppressive rules and regulations as are adults.

Moreover, the very recognition of the child as non-adult but none the less a person with a distinct worldview has opened up new ways of thinking, which David Kennedy describes as “epistemological pluralism”, thus concluding: “as the adult comes to understand the real and symbolic power of the childhood experience in his own psychological development, the child assumes a psychological presence that can compel the adult’s recognition.”

Its effect is clearly seen in the liberating potential of the late Victorian fairy tales to which I shall return in chapter VI. It is also reflected in works of visual arts appearing since the late nineteenth century, which had “a powerful deconstructive effect on major European artists who were presiding over the final dissolution of classical representationalism, and the emergence of the unconscious.” This was especially the case with the Cobra artists who carried the exalted child of the Romantics into a new era of critical thought, thereby viewing the child as both knower and subversive. Thus, Pierre Alechinsky believed that his artistic works constituted “a form of art which heads toward childhood... with the means available to adults.”

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Alechinsky meant was obviously “the child inside oneself” which would take years to discover. To this end, one ought to partake in “the imaginative play of children”, a desideratum that led Karel Appel, the Dutch painter, sculptor, and poet, to insist that we must “start again like a child.” Because in children’s play and visual art, argued Constant Nieuwenhuys, “the greatest possible latitude is given to the unconscious.” He further observed that “the child knows of no law other than its spontaneous sensation of life, and feels no need to express anything else.”

The focus on the newly discovered language of the unconscious and its association with the spontaneity of childhood emotions and fantasies also had a compelling influence on other prominent artists of the last two centuries. Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), the Russian painter and art theorist, viewed children as “the greatest imaginers of all time”, for their use game materials and poetical repetition of words immensely inspired many creative artists. Likewise, Claes Oldenburg (b. 1929), the Swedish sculptor, traced his creative urge to his childhood fantasies, declaring: “Everything I do is completely original. I made it up when I was a little kid.” Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), in a conversation with Sir Herbert Read remarked: “When I was the age of these children I could draw like Raphael. It took me many years to learn how to draw like these children.” Picasso’s reference was no doubt to an eye, which, though ‘innocent’ was none the less subversive. Like other subversive artists, he simply pointed to the language of the unconscious, a language which was “inherently oneiric, polysemic and transgressive.” This is precisely the reason, argues Jonathan Fineberg, why “we use ‘childish’ as a term of denial and rebuke – a taboo for the adult – and find the revelation

62. Claes Oldenburg, Claes Oldenburg Sculpture and Drawings, exhcat. (Stockholm: Modema Museet, 1966), iv, Quoted in Fineberg, The Innocent Eye..., 221, 133.
of the child-like in works of modern art so disturbing; they threaten our pact with the world.”

The origin of this new image of the child as embodying a particular realm of knowledge may be traced to nineteenth-century German Romanticism. The artistic impulse to expand “in creative modes of expression and a liberation of the imagination”, notes Wolfgang Beutin, comprised a common feature of Romantic literature. But the quest for “the creative playful handling of traditional forms and genres” led to yet another important feature of Romanticism, namely “the discovery of the unconscious and the irrational”. Hence, the Romantics, unlike the Enlightenment thinkers, “gave voice to archaic structures of aspiration and desire”, by focusing on such experiences as “madness, sickness, enthusiasm, sensuality, and idleness, which had been ‘policed’ in the Enlightenment.”

This new concept of childhood arose from the Romantic identification of the child with what Beutin describes as “a primeval stage of development, naturalness and wholeness, ... overlaid with a reverence for ancient poetic forms and an admiration of times past...” Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, author and philosopher of early German Romanticism, was most vocal in advancing this new image of the child in relation to the unconscious. Writing under the pseudonym Novalis, he declared: “The First man is the first spiritual seer. To him, all appears as spirit. What are children, if not such primal ones? The fresh insight of children is more boundless than the presentiments of the most resolute prophets.” Similarly, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, founder of the English Romantic movement, laid emphasis on a particular form of education that would “carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood” and “combine the child’s sense of wonder and novelty with the appearance which every day for perhaps

64. Fineberg, The Innocent Eye..., 23.
forty years had rendered familiar.” In his view, this form of education was “the character and privilege of genius.”

We must, however, note that the Romantic celebration of childhood did not stand in total opposition to the Enlightenment view of the child. It represented an intrinsically conflicting image, one that was as much endowed with spiritual purity as it was disposed to evil tendencies. The ambivalence resonated with the cultural landscape of the Romantic era that associated the child with nature, while at the same time holding back his/her natural propensities. If childhood innocence in a still predominantly Christian worldview was the embodiment of paradise, tendencies such as curiosity, disobedience, and imagination, would result in the child’s banishment from it. This was part of a disciplinary scheme used by the Romantics to instil proper behaviour in children, lest they might be sullied by the corrupting influence of the adult world. Thus John Ruskin warned:

Parents who are too indolent and self-indulgent to form their children’s characters by wholesome discipline, or in their own habits and principles of life are conscious of setting before them no faultless example, vainly endeavour to substitute the persuasive influence of moral precept, intruded in the guise of amusement, for the strength of moral habit compelled by religious authority: vainly think to inform the heart of infancy with deliberate wisdom, while they abdicate the guardianship of its unquestioning innocence; and wrap in the agonies of an immature philosophy of conscience the once fearless strength of its unsullied and unhesitating virtue.

Nevertheless, the Romantic view of childhood set in motion a process of reversal in the adults’ perception of children. Friedrich Schiller’s identification of the child as the primordial example of ‘genius’ was, in a way, recognition of the child’s imaginative power. In children, he argued, “we see eternally that which escapes us, but for which we are challenged to strive, and which, even if we never attain it, we may still

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hope to approach in endless progress.” What Schiller uttered was to underlie the works of the later Victorian writers such as Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, who came to acknowledge the uniqueness of the child’s world and his/her powerful grip on reality.

Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* is a case in point where, as Jonathan Cott points out, “men and women would explore their senses of childhood without apologizing for their wishing to do so or having to use alibis as Perrault felt he had to.” This ushered in a radical trend in the fairy tale both in its narrative structure and conveyed message. For one thing, the child of fiction was no passive recipient of the repressive rules and regulations, but a rebellious child whose power of imagination was poised to subvert the conventional world of adults.

This was a revolutionary interpretation of the nineteenth century Romanticism as it gave momentum to what Fineberg calls “a liberated expression of the self in a direct, sensual interaction with the world.” William Wordsworth, the English Romantic poet, connects the two traditions. His love of nature led him to the love of “the beggar, the peddler, the half-witted”, including children, as he “invited not only our attention but our admiration for them.” Wordsworth’s sympathetic view of the underclass and his radical view of the child paved the way for the subsequent literary figures, thinkers, and artists to carry on this unfinished project. Following Wordsworth, George MacDonald took a step further to present the inferior others “with so much delicacy, tact, and spirit that his leading persons seem to be gentry still, masquerading in a temporary eclipse of fortune, like the lost prince and princess of the fairy tale.” David Kennedy describes the connection between the two traditions in the following terms:

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Romanticism’s child has found her tortuous way, often in ambiguous, even ambivalent forms, into the twentieth-century psychoanalysis and art – most particularly in the contribution of Freud, for whom the inevitable passional conflicts of childhood became the key to adult self-understanding. Freud’s influence has led, in turn, to a problematization of that repressed ‘adult’.  

Let us now see how the growing recognition of the child’s world and its language resulted in what David Kennedy has called “epistemological pluralism”. He contextualizes the term as the “return of the repressed”, “when conquest and colonization underwent polar reversal.” He goes on to add: “A Trojan Horse entered the gates of Western Civilization, and the child, whom Jonathan Fineberg has described as ‘a kind of domestic noble savage,’ was in its belly.” However, something that Kennedy does not mention is the very pluralistic character of the concept of childhood which is conducive to this epistemological pluralism. He is of course well aware of the fact that “childhood has meant and can mean different things to children and adults in different culture and historical periods.”

In view of the fact that children do not constitute a uniform social group, it is difficult to arrive at a universal concept of childhood. Like adults, they are divided by class, race and gender as well as the culture into which they are born. One may not speak of a single child but of many children, or ‘savages’ who came out of the belly of Western civilization. Because, the focus on one particular category of children was inextricably tied to social and political representation of the excluded and vice versa. This is for the most part seen in the growing literature on children during the last several decades that include characters like the village boy or girl, children of colour, children of the working-class families, the orphans and the street kids. Just as the assertion or representation of a number of marginalized groups has at least partially, opened the path towards

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democratization of history, the inclusion of such diverse categories of children as historical subjects has enriched our conception of democratic pluralism. In the latter case, the growing recognition of their diversity has come to challenge the universality of the dominant mode of socialization that has for centuries constituted the cultural and ideological base of the power elite.

The Philosophical View of Childhood

Owing to the societal attitude that until very recently disapproved of children’s defiance to authority, it is only logical that their role in democratizing social institutions has been ignored. This is where the philosophical view of childhood intervenes to broaden our horizon of childhood subjectivity. Such a view is consistent with the reversal of the Platonic-Aristotelian adult/child dichotomy in favour of a hermeneutics of childhood based on the dialectical relationship between children and adults. I shall discuss the former in greater detail later in this chapter, but for now I confine myself to outlining the main characteristic features of an adult-child economy. In Kennedy’s description, these features represent:

…the vision of a counter-modern, post-adult utopia, in which the distinction between public and private self is abolished; we ‘live and feel in the present,” a “unitary, undivided existence.” The polarities that make for the “dividedness, alienation, and inner deadness of modernity” – between spirit and matter, mind and nature, desire and necessity – are overcome.77

With this in mind, childhood can no longer be seen “as an unformed adult subjectivity, but as a form of subjectivity in itself”, or in the words of Sandra Harding an “outsider within” with an “epistemic privilege.” This hermeneutics of childhood is part of an interpretative philosophy that bestows upon childhood “a form of subjectivity” which “is learned in the body.”78 It also questions the immutability of the psychological

and sociological laws, for as Prout and James state: “If social (and psychological) realities are constructions of human understanding and intentional activity then they can be made as well as unmade.”\textsuperscript{79} The importance of this hermeneutic approach is, in Qvortrup’s sociological account, the dismantling of the ‘naturalness’ with which the subordinate groups have been portrayed, a problem that all liberation movements had to address.\textsuperscript{80} In the case of children, the ‘naturalness’ in Jenny Kitzinger’s analysis, is associated with their “innate vulnerability (as a biological fact unmediated by the world they live in)”, and hence the need for their protection. It is worth noting that the construction of childhood in this way is, as Kitzinger further notes, “an ideology of control, which diverts attention away from the socially constructed oppression of young people.”\textsuperscript{81} She concludes:

Such refusal to accept children as fully human and such negation of their ideas and strategies not only ignores children’s individual acts of resistance but obscures relations between children and thus the importance of young people’s alliance with one another as a resource against adult violence.\textsuperscript{82}

The philosophical view of childhood is also consistent with a particular notion of subjectivity that draws no distinction between the phases of the human life cycle. The two phases of childhood and adulthood are both seen as a continuum, which, though in Freud’s psychoanalytic model, “diachronically laid out on the plane of life history, [is] always synchronically present in each personality.”\textsuperscript{83} As Walter Misgeld maintains, the relationship between the two phases is of an ever present nature, for “being an adult, if treated as a matter to be achieved again and again, makes us take note that we, as adults,

\textsuperscript{82} Kitzinger, “Who Are You Kidding?…”, 166.
\textsuperscript{83} Nandy, “Reconstructing Childhood…”, 71.
must think of ourselves as being like little children in order for us to be able to say that we are adults.”84

The omnipresence of childhood is also seen in an historical reciprocity between the child and adult, because in what Wilfried Lippitz describes: “my childhood is never a closed chapter in the story of my development. My identity as an adult is determined by the child I still am, as the child’s identity is determined by the adult he or she will be.”85 Similarly, in Kennedy’s interpretation of David Malouf’s novel, An Imaginary Life, childhood and adulthood are two overlapping stages: “The child carries [the child] as a horizon within, toward which he travels, but which he never reaches. The child carries the horizon of the adult within himself from an early age, which he does reach, passes beyond, and sees himself again in the distance.”86

A similar view is expressed by Charles Dickens through his fictional character David Copperfield: “I was a child of close observation or that as a man I have a strong memory of my childhood. I undoubtedly lay claim to both of these characteristics.”87 This is concurrent with what Merleau-Ponty terms as “the binding of past and future in the presence field of present.”88 Such a fusion in time rather than presenting “a synthetic activity of the subject”, identifies, as he points out, “a perpetual ekstasis, wherein the subject and object are ‘two abstract moments’ of a unique structure which is presence,” and hence the “oneness of man and the world, which is not indeed abolished, but repressed by everyday perception or by objective thought.”89

Thus, childhood as a living force in all stages of the human life cycles assumes the role of human agency, which reveals itself in the person of a child as well as an adult. As Polakow points out: “neither adult nor child can be thought of as autonomous parts,

88. Quoted in Lippitz, “Understanding Children...”, 56.
for the historicity of childhood is a fundamentally human historicity.”\(^\text{90}\) For one thing, “the remnants of an oppressed childhood” that resides within the adult becomes the gateway for the latter’s entry into the historical arena, even though the new adult at the same time “[includes] norms internalized from the ideology of adulthood.”\(^\text{91}\) This is seconded by Jenks who states: “When we talk of the child we are also talking of recollections of time past, images of current forms of relationship and aspirations towards future states of affairs.”\(^\text{92}\)

All this represents a movement in the philosophical conception of subjectivity “toward an open system” whose “elements are split, doubled, put in mutual reflection, and complicated by being both inside and outside the individual subject.” The movement has been highly consequential: it has dealt a significant blow to the age-old platonic “closed and hierarchical system.”\(^\text{93}\)

This open system is what seems to have inspired many writers of the late Victorian era whose fairy stories spoke to the child within, a tortured and oppressed, but nonetheless rebellious child. The authors embark on a historical journey to the distant past through the sheer act of self-dramatization in the persona of the protagonist. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, is a case in point. As Donald Backin notes, Alice’s prime objective is to turn upside down the orderly world of adults, by destroying the conventionally “false logic of [their] language with logic itself.”\(^\text{94}\) There is certainly a relationship between Lewis Carroll, the author, and his own experience as a repressed child, who resurfaces in the person of Alice, the subversively curious child.

**Problematizing Childhood**

That the integrated adult-child image has for the most part remained outside the purview of history is due largely to the isolation of children as separate entities, “reified in age-

\(^{90}\) Polakow, *The Erosion of Childhood*, 35.
\(^{91}\) Nandy, “Reconstructing Childhood…”, 70.
\(^{93}\) Kennedy, ”The Child and Postmodern Subjectivity”, 159.
\(^{94}\) Donald Backing, “Alice’s Journey to the End of Night”, *PMLA* 81, no. 5 (October 1966): 316-17.
graded institutions, universal schooling, and new, ‘adult’ definitions of public behavior, or *civilité*.” There were of course several reasons for the banishment of children from the adult world, but one which had its philosophical mark on the concept of childhood was the break with the Christian image of the child as being the embodiment of the original sin. It found expression in the notion of childhood innocence which has since dominated modern pedagogical discourses.

The image of the innocent child was in some fashion a return to the Stoic philosophical view of the child in so far as it shared a similar deficiency theory that wrested children of any agential role. This was specifically the case with the Platonic-Aristotelian perception of the child whose tripartite soul or self is marked by an imbalance between his/her appetite, will, and reason. Not only is the child seen as being deficient in reasoning, but s/he is incapable of exercising moral agency, primarily because the child’s appetite is the dominant force. Owing to the lack of reason and moral agency, the child cannot be happy, since happiness for both Aristotle and Plato was inextricably tied to the state of being virtuous, “a state in which the executive function of reason controls instinct and will.” To call a child happy, in this ontological exposition of childhood, is but to express one’s hopes of him becoming an adult. After all, free born and only free born male children could be moulded and transformed into adults, notwithstanding their untamed appetite and uncontrolled will. Hence, adulthood for both Plato and Aristotle essentially meant a stage of life in which the three elements come into “a normative balance”, thus making it possible for reason and morality to prevail. As Aristotle put it, “man calls himself man” simply by virtue of being guided by reason. Until then the child of the Stoic philosophical tradition characterized by “the great mass of multifarious appetites and pleasures and pains” is subsumed into the inferior multitude, whose status is comparable to that of slaves and women.

The legacy of this classical view of the child as an inferior other in Western intellectual discourses manifests itself in the modern concept of childhood. Although the

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95 Kennedy, “The Hermeneutics of Childhood”, 44.
child is no longer seen as a ‘dangerous creature’, as Aristotle had visualized, the belief in the inadequacy of the child to make sound judgements persisted. For this reason, the modern child, much like his/her ancient counterpart, was categorized as one amongst the inferior multitude until the attainment of adulthood. Similarly, the process of reaching adulthood meant that;

The children have in the space of a few years to attain to the advanced level of shame and revulsion that has developed over many centuries. Their instinctual life must be rapidly subjected to the strict control and specific molding that gives our society their stamp, and which developed very slowly over centuries…97

And yet, Elias throws light on a subject that pinpoints the reason for the middle-class perception of the modern child as being still a danger. Because:

The more “natural” the standard of delicacy and shame appears to adults and the more civilized restraint of instinctual urges is taken for granted, the more incomprehensible it becomes to adults that children do not have this delicacy and shame by “nature.” ...The children necessarily touch again and again on the adult threshold of delicacy and- since they are not yet adapted – they infringe the taboos of society, cross the adult shame frontier, and penetrate emotional danger zones which the adult himself can only control with difficulty. 98

To this end, a new mode of socialization was sought in concert with the societal effort at providing moral guidance to the child and safeguarding his/her innocence from the corrupting influences of the adult world. After all, the child’s close identification with nature, as David Kennedy points out, “had come to represent that world of instinctual freedom from restraint that the modern middle-class adult had, generation by generation,

increasingly foresworn.”99 The result of the systematic surveillance of children that began in early modern Europe gradually led to their confinement in a world of their own. The rise of the age-graded modern system of school was the culmination and pre-eminent manifestation of the process which began with the emergence of print culture. The young child who was incapable of reading could only get a limited knowledge of the surrounding world through the filter of adults whereas the child who could read became enmeshed in the processes of modernity and, especially, schooling.

**Childhood and the Discourses of Modernity**

The growth of modern scientific spirit was equally important in the construction of modern concept of childhood. It did so by assigning an inferior status to certain forms of knowledge which were increasingly identified with childhood. Consequently, childhood became a metaphor for rational deficiency applicable to those living on the margins of society and belonging to an inferior culture. In Kennedy’s words, as “the modern man, armed with science threw off superstition”, he at the same time “threw off childhood”, in an attempt “to eradicate the mythic or ‘childish dimensions of consciousness.” Rousseau’s demand that “the citizen must exclude nature and the unconscious” was in conjunction with the elimination of this childish dimension of the adult, since for him, “one cannot be both ‘man’ and ‘citizen’.” Again, as Kennedy further notes: “childhood signals the complete separation of adult and child,” and this followed the depiction of children as rationally deficient with the degradation of their status to the level of “non-citizen, as part animal and part human.”100 In Nandi’s words, children became homogenized “as a target as well as a metaphor of oppression.” He elaborates the point by establishing a close relationship between the metaphorical use of childhood and colonial ideology in the Indian context, where India was depicted as “half savage and half child.” While her savage existence needed to be civilized, her childish nature was to be socialized.101 A similar interpretation is brought forth by David Kennedy: “child might

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100. Kennedy, “Hermeneutics of Childhood”, 44, 47, 49, 50.
as well be marker for any subspecies real or imagined by the white male Western academic philosopher—women, primitive, insane, slave, poor, animal: the Other held at arm’s length.”

It is equally important to understand the manner in which childhood has been used by patriarchal ideology to deny not only children, but also women, equal rights and responsibilities. Ann Oakley notes how qualities and attributes such as “independence, rationality, intelligence, autonomy, and confidence belong to men, are seen as socially desirable, and are taken as standards of normal adulthood.” Women in contrast are depicted “as distinctly less adult, that is as more childlike, than men.” In this way, the institution of modern childhood produced an ideological formula for the social construction of inequality that above all reduced the status of children to a “protected and segregated realm historically generated by the educational system and bourgeois family.” This, has for the most part, been embodied in the displacement of children from “open streets” to “closed classrooms.” Its application in cultural terms was the rise of psychological discourses in the 1950s that helped create a new framework for their socialization. At the heart of it was “the scientific construction of the ‘irrationality’, ‘naturalness’ and universality of childhood”, which depicted children as “immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial, and acultural.”

Consequently, children as ‘non-citizens’ and ‘not-yet–adults’, if not ‘irrational’, were seen as not being historical subjects. For, if history was only the product of an active intervention on the part of the rational male adult, children had no role whatsoever to play. This was the dominant view that, until recently, is reflected in much of the literature on the history of childhood. As Furstenberg argues, even by the early 1990s, “the very absence of statistics on children represents a sign of the social neglect

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105. Prout and James, “a New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood…”, 12, 13.
of this age group.”

By this, he implies that virtually any data can be used to study children as an autonomous and potentially self-constructing group. Goran Therborn has viewed the problem from a more general and theoretical perspective:

The epochal importance of this process [the constitution of modern childhood] has largely been ignored, neglected, submerged or lost by histories of mentalité, by Foucauldian infatuation with policing, or simply by the unbridged ravines between academic disciplines and specialties.

Here, Therborn is pointing to a lost notion of the historical child, that is, the denial of historical agency to the child. Whether approached from a modernist/positivist perspective or from the opposite standpoint, the social construction of childhood denotes a unilateral process in which children are seen as passive objects helplessly witnessing the events taking shape around them. This objectification of childhood assumes the form of a battle over its ownership and possession, which is echoed in the attachment of the study of childhood to other fields of study, be it women’s studies or family history. It is no coincidence that the recognition of childhood as a separate field of inquiry has been closely related to the emancipation of the child from the overpowering world of adults. This was a turning point in the history of childhood that corresponded with the later phase of modernity, one which resonates with Elias’ second wave of the civilizing process.

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Chapter II: The Review of Literature on Childhood

In this chapter, I undertake a review of literature on childhood by categorizing the existing literature into two broad theoretical frameworks, namely socio-biological determinism and social constructionism. The former integrates childhood into medieval society by stressing the role of parental care. Just as the continuity of the parent-child relationship depends on this biological determinant, so does the existence of childhood. Here, cultural differences between the medieval and modern periods are minimized to portray childhood as a biological constant. Exponents of social constructionism, on the other hand, conceive of childhood as essentially a modern invention that entered western consciousness in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They, for the most part, deny the conceptual existence of childhood in medieval and early modern Europe.

While I present the argument on both sides, I concur with the latter view that childhood is a social construct. There is of course no disputing the fact that childhood is a biological stage in human development, but it is equally the product of major transformations in European socio-political structure, cultural landscape and worldviews. This accords with Elias’ account of modern Western civilization within which the conceptual vicissitudes of childhood can be explored. Within this context, childhood acquired a symbolic connotation denoting the underclass, the outcast and women who were the subject of control by the masters of the new world order.

**Philippe Ariès’ Social constructionist view of Childhood**

Philippe Ariès’ *Centuries of Childhood* is by all accounts the most provocative work of social constructionism. Central to his thesis is a twofold argument that medieval society did not recognize any concept of childhood, and that such a concept was essentially a new phenomenon, emerging out of modern discipline in early modern Europe. As he states:

In the medieval society, the idea of childhood did not exist: this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken, or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the
particular nature of childhood, that particular nature, which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society this awareness was lacking... ¹

Ariès is of the opinion that art and literature mirror social reality, and this is precisely what leads him to interpret the pictorial absence of children in medieval paintings as evidence for the absence of childhood. He inspects medieval art for traces of childhood, but when he does not find any, he concludes that medieval culture did not appreciate childhood, thus declaring:

Medieval art until about the twelfth century did not know childhood or did not attempt to portray it. It is hard to believe that this neglect was due to incompetence or incapacity. It seems more probable that there was no place for childhood in the medieval world.²

Some critics like Adrian Wilson have refuted Ariès’ methodology by calling it “extracting history from the sources” and confusing “the content of the sources” with “the attitude of the time.” Wilson further argues that changing modes of artistic expression in medieval art did not necessarily conform to the manner in which children were seen, since “it is not the attitudes of people at large, but the forms and features of art, which changed.”³ The same view is expressed by Linda Pollock, who opines that “the different types of childhood portrayed in paintings through the centuries may have more to do with changes in art rather than changes in the way children were seen,”⁴ Ross Beales takes a more historical approach, arguing that “the idea of ‘miniature adulthood’ must be seen, not as a description of social reality, but as a minor chapter in the history of social thought.”⁵ Peter Fuller’s views are comparable, although he does not appear to

¹. Ariès, Centuries of Childhood..., 128.
². Ariès, Centuries of Childhood ..., 20
adhere to the social constructionist view of childhood, or the notion that past societies failed to recognize the special nature of childhood. In “Uncovering Childhood”, he explicates Ariès’ theory of miniature adulthood, as derived from the morphology of medieval art in terms of “what the parents of the child hoped he or she would become.” Fuller further notes that “in Renaissance art, when the “child was not the principal subject of the picture, the reproduction of his or her appearance did not have to be done in a manner which would immediately please specific adults. The perceptive painter often placed pictorially contingent children within the space of childhood.” Ben-Amos puts the matter in a nutshell and concludes that “Ironically the greatest flaws in Ariès’s book turned to be the very historical methods he used.”

The problem though is not only methodological but ontological as well. By reducing childhood to a sentiment, shared by many, especially “mothers, nurses and cradle-rockers”, Ariès essentially denies its existence in pre-modern era. This prevents him from exploring an alternative view of childhood, concurrent with its medieval concept. It is therefore not the medieval but the modern attitudes to childhood which have been recorded as absent in Aries’ historical registry.

Thus, the signs which Ariès induces as proof of the conceptual absence of childhood in medieval society, could indeed be interpreted as evidence for a different concept of childhood. The lack of children’s special costume and their participation in activities of an adult nature may, for example, correspond to what John Alan Lee calls the property paradigm, where children were regarded as “chattels of the property-holding members of society, adult males.” These may equally be interpreted in the light of what Lloyd DeMause calls the principle of ‘projective reaction’, whereby children were used “as a vehicle for projection of the contents of [the parents’] own unconscious”.

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C. H. Talbot presents a whole body of documents from medieval sources in support of the pre-modern sentiment of childhood. For him, the medieval classification of childhood into different developmental stages is an important indication of the conceptual existence of childhood. His reading of the medieval accounts of social life suggests that childhood in the Middle Ages was divided into two distinct stages, each identified in response to a special set of needs society had accorded to children. The first is *infantia*, when the child is still under parental care and protection. *Infantia* is said to have usually lasted until age seven. The second is *pueritia*, starting from age seven until fifteen. *Pueritia* is the stage when, depending on the gender and social status of their families, children acquired education or skills to assume responsibilities later in life.

Talbot also quotes phrases from sources that not only acknowledge the existence of childhood, but also distinguish it from puberty and adulthood. Some run as these: “when he was a boy about eight years of age”, “when I emerged from the state of childhood and began to enjoy the freedom of doing what I liked”; “when he had reached the age of puberty and grew to a man’s strength “: “when he had attained the age of puberty, when it is usual to enter on the ways of the world”; “when he had thrown off the usual schoolboy’s yoke and was free to go his own way.”

Similarly, in “The Concept of Childhood in the Middle Ages”, Jerome Kroll presents various types of evidence to account for the medieval view of childhood. He cites examples by Bartholomaus Anglicus to demonstrate the recognition of the child’s special nature by the medieval world. The practice of swaddling, as recommended by Angelicus, is seen as a protective measure to prevent the new-born from becoming “twisted or suffer deformity.” Kroll quotes Angelicus as saying: “The infantile limbs, because of this weakness (the softness of the child’s nature), easily acquire different shapes and are, as a consequence tied with bondages [bandages?] and other suitable poultices…” The emphasis on dietary procedure and skin care by Angelicus is a further indication of the general concern for children in the Middle Ages. Such an emphasis is seen as a response to “a vulnerability, fragility, and yet a high value that was lacking in the adult.”

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The recognition of the minority status of children and the legal protection of their rights constitute yet another important dimension of the medieval concept of childhood in Kroll’s study. Referring to various codes of law from the Barbarians and those of the later Roman Empire, he finds strong provision for the protection of children’s rights against detrimental marriages and destructive wardships. In the Burgundian code (474-523), he encounters six out of 105 sections that specifically deal with the property rights of children, and a complete section on the care of foundlings. He also takes note of the Lombardian laws (643-755), some of which determine the minority status of children. Law VI for instance bans the marriage of a girl under legal age, which is determined to be age twelve. Law XII, on the other hand, restricts women from marrying young boys and pronouncing them as their “legitimate Husbands.” Another code brought up by Kroll pertains to wardship, which aimed to protect the child from abuses and mistreatment.12

Yet, while Ariès’ disposition of medieval childhood as conceptually absent may be problematic, his understanding of modern childhood as a construct is valid. In explaining the idea of childhood, he goes beyond “the modern demographic revolution” to focus on “the importance of the child’s role in this silent history.” The change in the family structure from “family viewed as a house” into a more “sentimental view”, is an important factor which added an emotional dimension to childhood. The new family in the seventeenth century, he notes, no longer functioned as an institution for transforming names and properties; it centred itself on the child. The change was accompanied by a passage from public to private life, which thereafter characterized the family environment. In this new climate, Ariès concludes, “the family fell back on the child” and “its life became identified with the increasingly sentimental relationship between parents and children.”13

This new sentiment of childhood is closely associated with modern discipline, and this is precisely the context within which childhood as a social phenomenon can be viewed. As Ariès points out: “there can be no doubt that the importance accorded to the

child’s personality was linked with the growing influence of Christianity on life and manners.” The belief in “childhood innocence” and “imperfection” in the sixteenth century appears to have given rise to the emergence of a system of social surveillance on children. Accordingly, the socializing role of school education did not just act as an instrument of discipline, but it became a “normal instrument of social initiation, of progress from childhood to adulthood.” Its function was primarily to enforce an age-specific social segregation, “to shut childhood off in a world apart.”

Viewed from this perspective, the systematic exercise of social control over children is an integral part of the construction of childhood, which was accelerated by the institution of modern schooling. Ariès observes: “The essential difference between the medieval school and the modern college lies in the introduction of discipline.” He then links this to “a parallel evolution of the concepts of age and childhood.” Consequently, when he details the emergence of widespread corporal punishment in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, he goes so far as to regard discipline as “a feature of the new attitude to childhood.” In fact, his account of the new concept of adolescence presupposes a stricter discipline, which was no longer associated with “the idea of the weakness of childhood”, but “toughness and virility” that “imposed a semi-military condition on the school population.”

Other Social Constructionist views of childhood

Lawrence Stone’s view of childhood is equally grounded in the progress of discipline to which children were increasingly subjected since the late medieval period. His focus is mainly on the changing nature of discipline in the seventeenth century from “prime reliance on physical punishment” to “reliance on the reward of affection and the blackmail threat of its withdrawal.” He writes:

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Between the remote, unfriendly attitude of early seventeenth-century upper-class parents, with their ruthless methods of crushing the will of the child, and the affectionate permissiveness of the mind and late eighteenth century, there was an intermediate stage, when the parents became affectionate towards their children, but still retained very tight control over them, now by psychological rather than physical means. It was recommended that parents now set their children an example, rather than crushing them by severe beatings.17

*The Child in Human Progress* by George Payne is another major work in which childhood is projected as a modern invention. Yet, despite the similarity of the author’s view with Aries’, he makes no reference to the role of discipline in the creation of childhood. Instead, he enumerates a series of developments in material culture and religious worldviews, which, in the passage from pre-historic to modern times, have resulted in a substantial improvement in the status of children. This presupposes “the altruistic maternal affection” out of which the moral idea of childhood emerged, and is what constitutes the “mental and moral evolution” and the survival of the child.

In Payne’s exposition, the changing practices from infanticide, the exposure and abandonment of children to child labour and beyond represent an evolutionary process in which the child, once perceived as futile, develops into a useful entity. He elaborates this in his discussion of the child as an “industrial factor” during the last few centuries, pinpointing the ill-treatment of children that came with “the desire to make them useful.” To this end, Payne refers to the inhuman conditions of child labour in the nineteenth century as well as a number of acts, notably those of 1802 and 1833, which ultimately paved the way for its abolition. This leads him to an evolutionary view of childhood which he upholds by citing other examples such as the establishment in 1883 of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in the United States.18

Payne’s concept of childhood no doubt falls within the civilizational matrix, but unlike Elia’s notion of civilization, it is uncritical and teleological in nature. At issue is the tendency to view state protectionist policies as the sole measures of a civilized

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society. Improvements in the social conditions of children do not necessarily alter the fact that children were still repressed, and that childhood had a negative connotation, often seen as a metaphor for oppression. These are some implications of modern civilization which have remained outside Payne’s purview.

In *Children and Youth in America*, Robert Bremner adopts a similar approach. He, too, situates childhood within the context of a democratic and liberating movement, traced to a rising humanitarian sentiment and embodied in interventionist state policy for the protection of children’s rights. In doing so, he goes beyond the realization of “an individualistic, laissez-fair, white democracy” and extend his vision to all children, irrespective of race and class. Covering the period from 1600 to 1973, Bremner gathers a whole range of documents in order to account for “a gradual elevation of the child’s status under the protection and patronage of public authority.”

Bremner also mentions the role of local, state, and federal authorities in elevating this particular view of childhood, who have “greatly increased expenditures for promoting child health and welfare, improving education, [and] protecting children against abuse and exploitation”. The formation of such institutions as the Bureau of Education in 1866, the National Child Labour Committee in 1905, the American Paediatric Society in 1888, foster homes, and juvenile courts are all seen as crucial moments in the emergence of a modern concept of childhood. Its progress comes to full

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21. Linda Pollock implies mistakenly that Bremner shares her pre-modern concept of childhood, based on parent-child emotional ties, when she states that “he [Bremner] does not claim that previously children were regarded as unimportant” (Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, p. 11). Her inference is simply drawn from Bremner’s account that the migration of New England Puritans was often “for the benefit of their children’s souls.” See Robert Bremner, *Children and Youth in America: 1600-1965*, vol. I, 3. Bremner even gives the example of Thomas Shepard, a minister in both old and New England, who “decided to leave because the anticipated birth and christening of his child would force him to reveal his Puritan sympathies to the authorities and thus jeopardise the security of his family.” (Bremner, *Children and Youth in America*, vol. I, p. 7). Such instances of parental concern for their offspring, Bremner would also agree, do not necessarily mean the recognition of children’s status. Although Bremner does not include in his work any discussion of medieval childhood, he nevertheless presents a highly differentiated view of childhood, seen in the different ways in which children have been treated in the past. Thus, when he makes a comparison between the conditions under which children worked in the past and the practice of child labour in modern times, he concludes: “In the earlier practice of household production children were not distinguished from adults. A child now answered to two masters: a foreman in the factory and a father at home.” (Bremner, *Children and Youth in America*, vol. I, 148.) Elsewhere, he expresses a similar view concerning children’s welfare, education, and health. As he comments: “Much of the philanthropic energy of the
view with the establishment of the US Children’s Bureau in 1912, when the federal government assumed responsibility “for promoting health and welfare of the young.”

Bremner is of course cognizant of the fact that the state imposition of social control was by no means absent. But he at the same time believes that the state intervention in protecting children’s rights “forced children to conform to public norms of behavior and obligations.” This conformity is achieved through the state policy of “uplifting and Americanizing the immigrant child”, who was considered “a social problem.” It is this educational aspect of discipline which he sees as having a positive impact on the progress of modern childhood. To him, schools are not merely institutions to “mould the young into loyal and useful American citizens”, but also to “assist the young in developing and fulfilling their capabilities.” He concludes:

…the child did not escape control; rather he experienced a partial exchange of masters in which the ignorance, neglect, and exploitation of some parents were replaced by presumably fair and uniform treatment at the hands of public authorities and agencies.

In *Children in English Society*, Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt conduct a similar, etiological study of childhood. Like in Bremner’s account, they link childhood to legislation coeval with a universal notion of welfare for children of all social backgrounds. In the authors’ view, this emanates from major advances in human sciences which result in “a growing understanding and appreciation of the necessary conditions for human life, health and happiness.” As they point out:

…a great deal of what we must value in our own social provision for children is not merely a recognition of a general responsibility for the young but a direct

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late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries went into the provision of special facilities for children formerly treated in the same way as adults.” (Bremner, *Children and Youth in America*, Vol. II, vii) It is probable that Pollock has either not read the work carefully, or has misrepresented Bremner’s position.

consequence of particular developments in the fields of medicine and
developmental psychology which give us an understanding of children and
childhood denied to our forebears.26

The result has been a radical change in social attitudes to childhood, initiated
by the nineteenth century philanthropic reformers, who pressed for a series of social
legislations to give a new status to children based on their legal rights. This is clearly
indicated in the emergence of new institutions for the care of orphans and destitute and
delinquent children, which the authors attribute to a joint effort on the part of both
volunteer organizations and local authorities.

Of particular importance to Pinchbeck and Hewitt is the recognition of the
child’s special nature. In fact, the ambivalence with which the authors view childhood in
Tudor times is a clear indication that the existence of childhood depends entirely on the
appreciation of its very special nature. While on the one hand, children are reported to
have “loomed large in the paternalistic legislation of the sixteenth and early seventeenth
centuries”, they are on the other hand depicted as having an invisible existence:

In Tudor, as in Victorian society, children were emphatically to be seen, not to
be heard. Indeed, a child was not even to be much in evidence to the eye. It was
deemed neither courteous, decorous nor wise to make him appear of value or note
in his own eyes or in the eyes of his seniors.27

Pinchbeck’s and Hewitt’s emphasis on the humanitarian aspects of social
policies and legislations of the late nineteenth century and beyond is emblematic of their
theoretical frame of reference, namely the civilizational matrix within which a growing
sentiment of childhood emerges. However, by the authors’ own admission, such a
sentiment was only confined to the middle-class. Childhood as a universal concept had
to wait until the early nineteenth century when there emerged “a new awakening of the

national conscience”, marking “the ultimate victory of philanthropic reformers over laissez-faire”.\(^{28}\) It was crystallized in

a challenging ideal of philanthropy and humanitarianism which, in relation to children, was devoted to securing them from greed and abuse; to providing institutions for the unwanted child; to training schemes for waifs and delinquents; and to providing some sort of education for the poor child.\(^{29}\)

So viewed, childhood is primarily the by-product of modern western civilization, embodied in a rising humanitarian movement towards improving the lives and status of children. Although the story of childhood in Pinchbeck and Hewitt’s account, as in Bremner’s, is one of liberation, it is certainly one that projects children as passive objects. It is a subjectless story of liberation in which the child appears to be mute and voiceless. It is also a story, which operates “within an adult-centric model of human behaviour”, and “serve to make children victims of adult agenda…”\(^{30}\)

In *Children Through the Ages*, Barbara Kaye Greenleaf attributes the growing interest in childhood to “a new absorption in biological and social sciences”, notably psychology, which accorded to children “a new status as subjects of legitimate scientific inquiry.”\(^{31}\) But unlike the previous authors who almost exclusively link the rise in children’s status to the humanitarian nature of public or state policy, Greenleaf infuses the element of discipline into the social construction of childhood. Although she acknowledges a substantial improvement in the status of children in the wake of the regulation of child labour and its abolition in the United States under the Wages and Hours Act of 1938, Greenleaf underlines the disciplinary nature of the reform measures. Here, she strives for a balance between the effects produced by children’s resistance to authority and the latter’s policy of socialization, both of which influence the course of childhood history.

\(^{28}\) Pinchbeck & Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, vol. I, 1, 4
\(^{29}\) Pinchbeck & Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, vol. I, 311.
\(^{30}\) Edgar, “Childhood in its Social Context…”, 27.
Greenleaf’s account of the playground movement is where the element of discipline appears to play an important role in the construction of the modern concept of childhood. She argues that the reason for the phenomenal expansion of parks and playgrounds in the early decades of the twentieth century was not “an appreciation of play and the benefits it could bring to children.” Rather, it stemmed from the eagerness of reformers to tame the unruly poor city children at a time when “the traditional sources of discipline” had lost much of their efficacy. This is explained by the public concern that “poor children might band together in mobs, destroying property, attacking citizens, and ultimately fomenting political chaos.” It was hoped that “playgrounds, by filling both the disciplinary and recreational voids in city life, would make children good.” The need “to teach immigrant children American values such as obedience to authority and loyalty to the team”, 32 is seen as yet another reason for the promotion of children’s recreational needs.

In *The Politics of Childhood*, Martin Hoyles gives primacy to the role of discipline in the social construction of childhood. His argument centres around two points. First, he posits modern childhood as a locus of social domination, symbolized by the introduction of the birch as an instrument of instruction. Second, he views children’s resistance to social surveillance as evidence of their agency that elevates them to the level of historical subjects. As he points out: “They [children] are struggling to be subjects who think, feel and act in the world, rather than being the objects of study, emotion and control.” 33 It is, therefore, children’s own struggle for their rights and freedom - both individually and collectively - which Hoyles views as being responsible for the resurgence of childhood as a liberating force in the post-Victorian era.

But Hoyles says nothing of children’s agency in pre-modern era, as if its applicability and scope are limited to modern times. By overlooking the actions of medieval children he practically denies them any such role, notwithstanding his interest in them. The inconsistency stems from Hoyles’ uncritical acceptance of Ariès’ belief that

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child prodigy controverts the very existence of childhood and ultimately its special character.

Greenleaf shares the same inconsistency, as she, too, reserves the role of historical agency exclusively to modern children. At issue is her understanding of the lack of parental emotional investment in their children that leads her to assume that children in the past were of little or no consequence to society. She reasons that since “the parent-child relationship [then] was not as emotionally charged as it is today”, it was “closer to primitive instincts than modern sensibility.” This is exemplified by numerous cases of harsh and brutal treatment of children such as the practices of infanticide, exposure, and neglect, which she draws from ancient and medieval sources. Such cases lead her to conclude that until early in the sixteenth century “the historical concept of childhood had not yet arrived.”

To support her claim, Greenleaf resorts to demography, suggesting that the evolution of modern childhood had much to do with a decline in child mortality. Such a decline, owing to improved hygiene, infant nutrition, and medical care, is seen as a crucial factor in generating a new concern for children’s physical and emotional well-being. To her, these improvements in material culture constitute the very conditions under which childhood as a valued social entity was born. As she states: “When the child moved out of the twilight zone between existence and non-existence which he had occupied throughout history, his well-being took on great importance.”

This aetiological view of childhood has been argued more vigorously by Lawrence Stone. In *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, Lawrence Stone takes a demographic approach and arrives at a similar conclusion that childhood was a modern phenomenon. He makes a direct correlation between high mortality and a “low gradient affect”, stating that the lack of parental concern for their offspring was the result of poor expectations of survival for young children. He further argues that in order to preserve their mental stability, parents imposed certain limitations on their psychological involvement with their infants. For “the longer a child lived”, he maintains, “the more

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34 Greenleaf, *Children Through* ...,37-40, 44, 69.
35 Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*..., 105.
36 Greenleaf, *Children Through* ..., 70.
likely it was that an affective bond would develop between it and its parents.”

Stone’s demographic approach to the study of childhood goes as follows:

The omnipresence of death coloured affective relations at all levels of society, by reducing the amount of emotional capital available for prudent investment in any single individual, especially in such ephemeral creatures as infants. One result was the neglect of infants by their parents, which in turn reduced the former’s prospects of survival.

In *The Making of the Modern Family*, Edward Shorter disputes the demographic explanation of childhood, arguing that high rates of infant mortality may not necessarily explain the lack of maternal love. Rather, it is the absence of this love itself that precipitated it, because “parental negligence played a part in bringing about the demise of their children.” As he comments:

The point is that these mothers did not care, and that is why their children vanished in the ghastly slaughter of the innocents that was traditional childrearing. Custom and tradition and the frozen emotionality of ancien-regime life gripped with deadly force. When the surge of sentiment shattered this grip, infant mortality plunged, and maternal tenderness became part of the world we know so well.

To Shorter, this accounts for a significant change in the status of children from being viewed as undervalued creatures to their treatment as worthy individuals. The emergence of modern attitudes towards children, and a “residual affection” that links the child and the parent. This is evident in his emphasis on “good mothering” as “an invention of modernization”, for it “gave the entire family a new emotional base and introduced a rationale, independent of romantic love, for withdrawing from community life.” He concludes: “The emotional web that was spun between mother and baby would

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reach out to envelop older children and the husband: a sense that the preciousness of infant life required an equally delicate setting for its preservation.”  

The linkage between reduced mortality rate and the growing importance of children that constitutes the basis of Shorter’s hypothesis has met with criticism. In *Pricing the Priceless Child*, to which we shall turn later, Viviana Zelizer, casts doubt on the validity of this linkage. She cites the American example in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, arguing that despite high mortality rates, “colonial parents were never indifferent to their children.” She also quotes David Stannard, who holds that “a deep-seated parental affection for children was the most common, normal, and expected attitude” among the Puritans. Referring to Ariès, she also notes that the first indication of the fact “that the child was no longer…considered as an inevitable loss” appeared in the sixteenth century, a period of “demographic wastage.” For this reason, she insists that, ‘the individualistic and psychological focus of both the “rational investment” and “better love” arguments is misguided.’

In “The Evolution of Childhood”, Lloyd DeMause presents a psychogenic historical account of childhood, equally grounded in the parent-child relationship. He proceeds with an overview of child abuse, neglect and infanticide, which prevailed in pre-modern era. As he points out:

> The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized, and sexually abused.

To DeMause, this represents the conceptual absence of childhood in the past which was due not to the lack of love or emotion for children, but to the lack of “the emotional maturity needed to see the child as a person separate from [the parent].” But

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as for the evolution of childhood, he imputes it neither to the role of technology nor to economic factors. He rather sees the process in conjunction with “the psychogenic changes in personality occurring because of successive generations of parent-child interactions.” Accordingly, childhood is primarily seen as a by-product of parental emotional maturity, which has passed through successive phases of child rearing. Thus, under the socializing mode, when “the raising of a child became less a process of conquering its will than of training it”, it was possible to undertake “guiding it into proper paths, teaching it to conform, socializing it.”

It is worth noting that in DeMause’s exposition, as in those advocating state protectionist policy, there is a strong teleological tendency. He hails changes in the social world of children as necessarily a progressive step in the direction of childhood redemption. Such an approach, in Nandy’s words, “offsets modern violence against various traditional forms of institutionalized violence.” They tend to ignore the fact that while “the inequality between the adult and the child may come to depend less on brute force”, it “may not automatically decline.” Nandy is seconded by others like Don Edgar, who considers the modern construction of childhood as leading to “an increase in the sentimental concern for children”, while at the same time characterizing the outcome as “the demotion of the child to the completely dependent child.”

Moreover, the view that portrays medieval children as conceptually absent loses sight of the cultural parameters within which childhood existed. While it is true that most medieval children might have been constantly subjected to harsh treatment, it was, as Valerie Polakow implies, “part of the generalized social cruelty of the time.” She notes that “both adults and children, nobility and the poor, were subjected to widespread abandonment, punishment, and mutilation for what appears to us today as minor offences.” This resonates in what Kroll describes as “the poorly developed concepts of

45. Zelizer, Pricing …, 3.
46. DeMause identifies six child-rearing modes: infanticidal, abandonment, ambivalent, intrusive, socializing, and helping. In his analysis, the formation of a modern concept of childhood starts from the intrusive mode, but finds full expression in socializing mode, beginning in the nineteenth century, and ultimately reaches its evolution with the helping mode.
the rights of individuals in general”, referred to as a justification for the inferior legal status of medieval children in comparison with their modern counterparts.51

Both these observations find expression in Foucault’s statement concerning the discovery of the body “as an object and target of power” since the Classical age. As he points out: “It is easy to find signs of the attention then paid to the body- to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces.”52 But he also adds that the eighteenth century heralded a significant shift in the nature of discipline from the taming of the body to the training of the psyche, or from the public to the private sphere of control. Its areas of operation are primarily within the social spaces created, for

It is spaces that provide fixed positions and permit circulation; they carve out individual segments and establish operational links; they mark places and indicate values; they guarantee the obedience of individuals, but also better economy of time and gesture. They are mixed spaces, real because they govern the disposition of buildings, rooms, furniture, but also ideal, because they are projected over this arrangement of characterisations, assessments, hierarchies.53

James, Jenks, and Prout, the authors of Theorizing Childhood, take Foucault’s argument a step further to give utterance to the conditions of modern childhood. They, too, see modernity as the harbinger of a transition from “the disciplinary convention of physical violence against [the child’s] body” to his/her confinement to a symbolic social space. This is a process that was consolidated during the period between 1850 and 1914, which according to T. Cockburn, whom the authors quote, “witnessed the removal of children from the ‘public spaces’ of the streets and workplace to their homes, schools and organized entertainment.” A concrete example of this confinement is provided by Cockburn, who stated: “We have moved, then, from a collective to an individual space, with the public and external experience of shame and degradation transformed into the

53. Foucault, Discipline and Punish..., 148.
private and inner experience of guilt.” The move is signified in “changing regimes of
childrearing, pedagogy and educational psychology”, with the intention of governing and
regulating the soul and the movement of the child.” Consequently, “modernity’s child,
at school, on the street and even at home becomes its own policeman.”

It is worth noting that the prevalence of such practices as infanticide, child
abandonment and neglect in medieval society, contrary to what DeMause, Shorter and
Stone believe, does not necessarily alter the fact that childhood indeed existed in the past.
But as Kroll states: “If we look for a modern Western concept of childhood, we should
not be surprised when we do not find it. It is more likely that children then were viewed
differently than children now, but still viewed as children.” Thus, while children may
have been of lesser value in the past, childhood has certainly been present, though
differently conceived.

Harry Hendrick refers to this theme in his account of the constructions and
reconstructions of British childhood. He argues that until the end of the seventeenth
century society in general had an ambiguous notion of childhood. But by 1914 a
“recognizably ‘modern’ notion was in place: childhood was legally, legislatively,
socially, medically, psychologically, educationally and politically institutionalized”
Chronologically, these constructions prior to the World War I are termed as: “the
romantic child, the evangelical child, the factory child, the delinquent child, the schooled
child, the psycho-medical child, and the welfare child.” which are followed by “the child
of psychological jurisdiction” and “the family child.” Thus, for example, the romantic
child is traced to the “cult of sensibility associated with Rousseau”, which after the
French Revolution “co-existed with the political economy of a growing child-labour
force in factories and mines.”

The emergence of the delinquent and schooled child is ascribed to the necessity
of keeping the qualities of childhood intact and the desirability of altering the “nature of
childhood” in accordance with the reform of habits and manners. Not only was it
demanded that “a child is to be treated as a child”, but also the child’s knowledge had to

be based on a “state of ignorance.” The psycho-medical and welfare child is seen as the outcome of a “class dominated and ‘expert’ formulated concepts of childhood on the general population.”

Hendrick’s argument is in many ways an expansion of the theme that Zelizer has developed in *Pricing the Priceless Child*. Although in the latter’s case, modernity plays an important part, it does not necessarily endow children with historical agency. In fact, modernity has in one way or the other caused the objectification of children. This is explained in terms of a “shift in children’s value from ‘object utility’ to “object of sentiment”, a shift that first occurred among the middle-class in the mid-nineteenth century, and a century later was extended to working-class families. In Zelizer’s account, the principal factor for this shift is to be found in the cultural transformation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that gave momentum to a process of “Sacralization of children.”

The rise of industrialism in the eighteenth century is, in Zelizer’s assessment, what transformed children into an object of economic utility, as they were incorporated into the marketplace. In this sense, the “useful child provided a unique economic buffer for the working-class family of the late nineteenth century.” Yet, with the rise of industrial capitalism between 1870 and 1930, the productive value of children witnessed a significant decline in most Western societies. The demand for “a skilled, educated labor force” together with the need to educate rather than hire children had resulted in their gradual exclusion from the labour market.

The process was set in motion with the child labour legislations and the ongoing campaign for its abolition in the United States during the first three decades of the twentieth century, which for Zelizer are the underlying mechanisms for change in the social value of children. The change was further accelerated by what she refers to as “the new rules for educational child work” that “cut across classes”, to be “equally applicable to all ‘useless’ children.” Thus, as she puts it: “The price of a useful wage-earning child

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was directly counterpoised to the moral value of an economically useless but emotionally priceless child.” As the latter became the conventional norm by the turn of the century, “children were to be kept off the market, useless but loving, and off the streets, protected and supervised.” Yet, the sacred child was “a private luxury”, “in need of public support”, but “treated unsentimentally”, and “assisted only if the investment is justified in economic terms.”

The primacy of culture over structure in Zelizer’s explication of the rising value of children is noteworthy. As she declares: “The nineteenth-century revolution in child mourning as well as the twentieth-century campaign for child life are less significant as measures of changes than as dramatic indicators of a broader cultural transformation in children’s value.” Even when she admits that “rising real incomes” and the improvement in “the standard of living” enabled working-class families “to keep their children in school”, she at the same time maintains: “The issue of child labor, however, cannot be reduced to neat economic equations.” This is where culture appears to be of particular importance in shaping the events that brought about the process of “sacrilization of children”, an interpretation that ignored the political struggle of the working-class that resulted in a rise in “real incomes” in the first place.58

In The Disappearance of Childhood, Neil Postman takes an altogether different approach, but one that gives expression to the historical mutability of childhood. Central to his thesis is the change in the defining characteristics of childhood, as they are made and unmade in response to technological innovations. From this perspective, he claims that “unlike infancy, childhood is a social artifact, not a biological category.” He underlines two distinct cultural mechanisms which have had a significant impact on social attitudes towards childhood, namely the printing press and the electronic media. Whereas the first created childhood as a separate “social and intellectual category”, the second ushered in its disappearance.

The creation of the modern concept of childhood is, for the most part, attributed to the function of the printing press as a predominantly adult-centred medium of communication. Not only did the communication environment of the sixteenth century

58. Zelizer, Pricing ..., 60, 112, 82, 58, 75, 210, 216, 32, 6-63.
make literacy a prerequisite for information processing and dissemination, it also made reading competence an exclusively adult prerogative. Consequently, the literate adult surpassed the young who would “have to become adults… by learning to read, by entering the world of typography.” In this way, adulthood, as Postman notes, “became a symbolic, not a biological achievement”, which had to be earned through the mastery of the printed words.

At the same time that the literate adult dominated the social scene, there emerged a new interpretation of childhood due to children’s inability to read and access adult secrets. In Postman’s view, as in Ariès’, this new concept was defined in terms closely related to the idea of education, since the journey to the literate world of adults began with “the task of learning how to read.” This is demonstrated in close conjunction with the nascent idea of child development whereby the exclusively adult-controlled information “was made available in stages in what was judged to be psychologically assimilable ways.” Childhood was therefore acknowledged as “a level of symbolic achievement” and “a feature of the natural order of things”, with a special nature and different needs, which required both “separation and protection from the adult world.” In addition, childhood increasingly came to be associated with the notions of shame and innocence. An indication of this new concept is given with respect to the school curriculum as being “the most stringent and persistent expression of adult-imposed censorship.”

Subsequently, Postman speaks of the contemporary view of childhood, which is linked to a shift in the medium of information “from the personal and regional to the impersonal and global.” This emanates from the undifferentiated nature of the information that the electronic media makes accessible to all ages. Of particular importance is the role of the electronic media in eroding “the differentiation of intellect” as “necessary to sustain a distinction between adulthood and childhood”, and hence in altering both the quality and quantity of information now accessible to children. The effect is especially seen in “an uncoordinated but powerful assault on language and

literacy” upon which had rested the social and intellectual basis of the information hierarchy that defined childhood.

Thus, with the advent of television, argues Postman, the dividing line between children and adults begins to collapse, as it undermines the very historic basis of this information hierarchy. Because television, unlike the printed word, “does not segregate its audience”, since “it requires no instruction to grasp its form.” He further notes that television as a medium of communication “opens secrets, makes public what has previously been private”, with no way of closing things down, and “no physical, economic, cognitive, or imaginative restraints.”

All this, in Postman’s view, explains the reason why in the age of television there are few clear-cut social distinctions between children and adults. What he refers to as the rise of “adultified child” and “childified adult” is to describe the recent convergence of the two concepts, which he then compares to the situation in the medieval period. While the parallel drawn emphasizes the childish indifference of adults, it at the same time depicts children as “miniature adults in the manner of thirteenth and fourteenth-century paintings.”

Marie Winn and Valerie Polakow draw a similar parallel between the medieval and contemporary conceptions of childhood. In *Children Without Childhood*, Winn bases her argument on the collapse of “the traditional, hierarchical structure of family” which underlies the erosion of the dividing line between childhood and adulthood in the contemporary era. Viewing the problem from a feminist perspective, she shows how the influx of women into the work force and the equal relations between the sexes within the family have “necessitated new ways of dealing with children.” This has often meant an equal treatment of children on a par with adults. Winn notes:

> as women began openly to object being protected from the realities of life, being dependent, being treated as little pets, being condescended to under the guise of

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adoration and special care, they began to resist dealing with their own children in a similar manner.\(^{62}\)

Like Postman, Winn refers to the role of the electronic media in the erosion of childhood characteristics. Not only did television deprive children of their childhood by eliminating play from their lives, observes Winn, but it also created “a new equality between adults and children.” Such considerations constitute the basis of her argument that “today, after several centuries of childhood as an estate carefully separated from adulthood, it begins to appear that we are returning to a long-ago patterns of undifferentiation- a New Middle Ages, we might call it.”\(^{63}\) Yet, this new concept of childhood is equally grounded in an egalitarian impulse that facilitates the desolation of childhood characteristics, and ultimately the convergence of the social worlds of children and adults.

In *The Erosion of Childhood*, Polakow posits a particular variance of social constructionist view in which the focus is on the historical agency of children, expressed in the dialectic act of work-play. “It is through play”, argues Polakow, “that the child restructures, invents, makes history and transforms her given en-soi reality.” “Stripped of the power to play and invent”, she reasons, “children were denied the opportunity to become meaning-makers in their own small world.”\(^{64}\) The latter situation underlines Polakow’s account of contemporary childhood, which is the result of a dichotomy in the dialectic of work-play. To her, this marks a return to the medieval condition of childhood, because contemporary children, like their counterparts in the past, are equally denied a full expression of their childish characteristics, and ultimately their praxis upon the world.

Polakow criticizes the adult representation of childhood that fails to provide its proper ontological exposition. This is seen in the function of the modern institution of childhood that acknowledges the taxonomy of childhood on the one hand, and undermines its ontological basis by creating a distorted image of the child on the other.

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\(^{62}\) Winn, *Children without Childhood*, 115.

\(^{63}\) Winn, *Children without Childhood*, 143, 7, 46, 205.

\(^{64}\) Polakow, *The Erosion...*, 172, 203.
From this perspective, the conceptual absence of children from medieval consciousness is explained as a logical outcome of this act of representation, which is in complete disagreement with any awareness of the child’s special nature. Concomitantly, this modern image of childhood is intertwined with a notion of discipline that suppresses children’s natural tendency towards a free expression of their historical agency. As she observes:

…having separated children from the world of work, having infantilized [children’s] perceptions and moral sensibilities with insidious moral inventories and taxonomies, having circumscribed their lives in schooling institutions where their experiences, intellect, and state of being are constantly measured, quantified, and evaluated, we have perhaps rediscovered childhood, but in so doing eroded its very ontology as a life phase.65

Here, the role of school education as an instrument of social control is given prime importance, since “the particular forms of childhood created through the social ideology of ‘schooling’ … eroded that life phase and imposed a false structure of meaning on the ontological development of the child.”66 Polakow’s emphasis on the spontaneity of the act of play echoes the views of Iona and Peter Opie, who maintain that “it is not only the nature of the game that frees the spirit, it is the circumstances in which it is played.” Because in an environment free of adult influence “a child can exert himself without having to explain himself.” The child also “creates a situation which is under his control”, and can “extend his environment, or feel that he is doing so, and gain knowledge of sensations beyond ordinary experience.”67

Polakow’s disposition of childhood, predicated on the instrumental act of children’s play overlooks other variance of historical causality. Of particular relevance is the very logic behind the repressive ideology that yields changes in the opposite direction of what was originally intended. The statement by the authors of Theorizing Childhood is quite apposite: “Children are in a sense empowered by the structures which

constrain them." This is precisely where children’s play as a form of praxis enters the equation to combat an already weakened structure. Many of subversive works of children’s literature emerged at this historical juncture which corresponds to the intellectual milieu of the late and post-Victorian era. Nevertheless, Polakow’s epistemological exposé concerning “the history-making power of children” is crucial for our understanding of their contribution to history. The contribution may best be seen in their ability to turn their imagination to reality by directing their wishful thinking toward establishing a more permissive and egalitarian society.

The Socio-Biological approach to Childhood

Let us now turn to the position of the socio-biologist determinists on the subject, who present a rather static view of childhood. In doing so, they project a glorified image of the past, a past which as Peter Laslett said, “was no paradise, no golden age of equality, tolerance or of loving kindness.” Linda Pollock is the leading exponent of socio-biological determinism, who categorically dismisses the social constructionist paradigm, thus arguing for the conceptual existence of medieval children. In *Forgotten Children*, she makes the following counter-argument:

> Many historians have subscribed to the mistaken belief that, if a past society did not possess the contemporary Western concept of childhood, then the society had no such concept. This is a totally indefensible point of view- why should past society have regarded children in the same way as Western Society today. Moreover, even if children were regarded differently in the past, this does not mean that they were not regarded as children.

Pollock’s theoretical horizon is of course valid, but it is used in such a way as to support an immutably universal concept of childhood, one which applies to both “preliterate” and “complex” societies. The conclusion stems from her overemphasis on the role of parental care in moulding and determining the continued existence of

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70 Pollock, *Forgotten Children…*, 263.
childhood as a socio-biological fact. To Pollock, the human reproductive function in the form of parental care is what warrants the survival of childhood, otherwise it would simply mean that “parents [were] acting in direct opposition to their biological inheritance.” Such a scenario would be impossible, since “the primary function of the parental role is that of protection”, and that “parents will sacrifice a good deal, consistent with the maximization of their own inclusive fitness, to ensure the survival of their young.”71 This biological component of Pollock’s theory is further stressed in the light of the role that childcare plays in the evolution of “living things” and the survival of their race.

Such a view of childhood disregards the sociological categories of class, race, and gender, and ultimately sets aside the cultural variations within the concept. Pollock concedes that “different cultures may possess different methods of child-rearing”, she believes “they all have the same aim; to raise their child from infancy to an independent, responsible adult capable of full participation in society.”72 Rejecting this universal model of childhood, Martin Richards observes:

…universal laws that were supposed to hold good across all societies and at all historical times… such terms as ‘the mother’ and ‘the child’ not only conveyed a meaningless generality but also misrepresented the relationship between individual and social worlds and portrayed social arrangements as if they were fixed by laws of nature.73

There is also a strong sense of familialization in Pollock’s theory, which, as David Oldman states, by reducing children “to their role within a parent-child relationship”, deprives childhood of its social character.74 While it is true that childhood, as some social theorists point out, “is united by the universal biology of human physical development and cognitive potential but, in the same moment, radically differentiated by

71. Pollock, Forgotten Children, 43. 36-39.
72. Pollock, Forgotten Children..., 37.
73. Quoted in Prout and James, “A New Paradigm…”, 20.
the varied social contexts in which this growth can be culturally enacted in the life course.”75 Pollock’s universal model of childhood, explicated in the matrix of parent-child interaction as a socio-biological continuum, leads her to overlook much of the effect produced by cultural and institutional changes on the evolution of childhood. She overlooks the fact that such changes, to quote Ivar Frønes, not only affect “the content of social interaction but also the content of, and the relations among, the social stages of development.”76 Frønes further notes that “the structure and form of society influence socialization by shaping the social and cultural framework of childhood.” This is in fact well demonstrated in his differential view of modern childhood, based on” individualization and individuation.”77

But Pollock pays little attention to the socio-cultural variables in shaping the lives of children. As she points out: “The sources used reveal that there have been very few changes in parental care and child life from the 16th to the 19th century in the home, apart from social changes and technological improvements.”78 There is no mention of any attitudinal change toward childhood, as if biology determines all aspects of parent-child relationship. In this context, the remark by U. Beck is quite apposite:

…one of the most important changes in parent-child relationship during recent decades has been the increasingly intense attempt of many parents to take the individuality of their children seriously without any “age-related” cut-offs; not as something that is only developing but as individuality here and now, as present individuality. This encloses the heart of a new equality of the child- the “emancipation of the child.” The child who is acknowledged to have individuality, is assigned individuality, turns from an object to a potential subject of individuality acknowledgement. Parents perceive the respect of their children-not the general thankfulness but their personal respect…the child is transformed into an authority…79

75. James, Jenks and Prout, Theorizing..., 59.
76. Ivar Frønes, “Dimensions of Childhood”, 162.
77. Frønes, “Dimensions of Childhood”, 164, 152.
78. Pollock, Forgotten Children, 268.
Pollock’s concept of childhood is in keeping with her perception of children as organisms, which “pass through developmental periods, indulge in play, need care, protection, and guidance.” Likewise, the changes accounted by Pollock in relation to childhood are suggestive of an elaboration of the concept during the later modern period, whence “the child was accorded a central role in the family life and his rights were protected by the state.” Presumably, this refinement of the concept is for the most part imputed to the very mechanism of change inherent in the transcendental nature of parent-child relationship. Pollock strenuously refuses to relate the history of childhood to other historical trends. She vehemently criticizes those who "have looked for changes in perceptions of children” rather than keeping “a sense of proportion.” She critically remarks: “They have merely assumed that, if society itself has altered over the centuries, then attitudes to and treatment of children must have changed too, in accordance with those trends.”

Pollock’s dismissal of cultural influences is most evident in her analysis of the shift in the forms of punishment meted out to children. Rejecting the link between discipline and the modern concept of childhood, she argues that in the period from the sixteenth to the end of the nineteenth century there has been little change in the form of disciplinary techniques imposed on children. She goes on to argue that “extreme forms of punishment were condemned by society and parents”, and that “brutality [to children] was the exception rather than the rule.” Using Henry Machyn’s diary, she adds that “abuse and punishment were differentiated and that the former was condemned long before there was any formal child protection legislation.” This is in line with her findings that only a minority (reportedly 17 percent) of the autobiographies, and not the majority of them, recall having received physical punishment. This is attributed to variations in parental attitudes towards the upbringing of their children. While some parents exercised considerable power over their children, others were unable to do so, or simply did not compel their offspring to obey. 80 As she reports:

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80. Pollock, Forgotten Children, 64, 148, 161, 185.
The information provided by the sources reveal that parents, through the centuries studied, have tried to control, or at least regulate, their children’s behaviour. Various methods have been employed to achieve this objective: physical punishment, deprivation of privileges, advice, lectures, making the child feel ashamed, and remonstrations. The method used to discipline a child varied according to the parent and child rather than the time period, with the possible exception of the early nineteenth century - in every century strict and indulgent parents appeared.81

Although Pollock at times acknowledges the “slow and often subtle shifts in social, economic and cultural contexts, which have modified the lived realities of parenthood and childhood through the centuries”, she nonetheless sees them as exceptions to the general rule of biology.82 The subordination of the former to the latter is, in particular, seen in the predominance of “the protective nature of the parental care” over the necessity of regulating a child’s behaviour that “inhibits most parents from enforcing their authority with brutality.”83 This is in tandem with her overall position that “some basic features of human experience”, as for example types of emotion, “are not subject to change”, but will be present in all societies.84 The assumption leads her to conclude that “parents in the past did want their children rather than that the children were unwanted.”85 To her, this alone stands as a testimony to the existence of the medieval concept of childhood.

Curiously enough, much of what Pollock presents as evidence against Ariès’ main thesis is misinterpretation of his views. To recall, Ariès’ reference to the concept of parental indifference to their offspring does not necessarily mean the lack of emotions for children. The inference that it does is a misrepresentation, which Pollock uses as the very basis of Ariès’ argument for the conceptual absence of medieval childhood. It is rather the notion of child prodigy that underlies his understanding of children in the past,

81. Pollock, Forgotten Children, 199.
84. Pollock, A Lasting Relationship…, 13.
85. Pollock, Forgotten Children, 205.
a notion that at the same time distinguishes the medieval from the modern childhood. For one thing, child prodigy was universally applicable to all medieval children, as they all demonstrated some adult qualities.

Nor is Ariès’ notion of discipline, as Pollock postulates, confined to physical punishment. It is a much wider concept that encompasses socialization as an effective means of administering children’s conduct, a method that came into effect with the rise of nuclear family and the institution of modern schooling. Pollock’s failure to fully comprehend Ariès’ viewpoints has led her to unnecessarily delve into the medieval sources for evidence in support of the absence of physical punishment. Her subsequent work, *A Lasting Relationship*, is a concerted effort in this direction. It is a compilation of a large number of documents such as personal memoirs and correspondence on childbirth, child rearing, child physical and emotional development, children’s games and play, and parental attitudes and advice to their children. In the section on parental care and child rearing, it is suggested that “Children, then as now, occupied a unique place in the home.” In the section on accidents, illness and death of children, the cited documents are to support the view that 1) “Children’s health was a matter of grave concern to their parents”, 2) “Parental anxiety at the sickness of their offspring was exacerbated by the fact that any illness could lead to death”, and 3) “the grief felt by parents when their children did die.” In the section on child rearing and discipline, she refutes the belief that “children were subject to a severe regime under cruel parents”, thus presenting a counterargument that “parents strove to understand their offspring, to protect them from the dangers of the outside world and to bring them up to the best of their ability.”

Yet, the documents are not likely to be representative of the entire society. Rather, they reflect the cultural viewpoint of the privileged few who, by virtue of their distinct social status and literacy, gave expression to the maxims of parental care and responsibility. The majority had neither the ability to articulate their parental duties, nor the necessary means to accommodate the needs and expectations of their children. Class introduces significant variations in the parental perceptions of childhood. Parents of

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lower social class and status might have held a minimal view of children’s rights and privileges, including the actual value afforded the children themselves. Evidence may be adduced for benevolence among the elite, but the less privileged may have been indifferent. As Postman attests: “in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially in England and among the poor classes, adults were not often in a position to develop or display the level of affection and commitment toward children.”

Reading history through the filter of an articulate minority also characterizes the works of Alan Macfarlane, a predecessor of Pollock’s. In *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin*, he probes the personal diaries of a single individual to find evidence in support of an emotionally charged parent-child relationship, and consequently the conceptual existence of childhood. Ralph Josselin was a seventeenth-century clergyman, and by all accounts, a man of distinction. Macfarlane evidences the details of Josselin’s childhood as a happy experience, as well as the blissful events of the births of his own children, as confirmation of his view that “children were greatly welcomed by their parents.” The first sentence of Josselin’s diary reads: “I was borne to the great joy of father & mother being much desired as being their third child, as it pleased God, their only sonne.” Macfarlane adds:

> He [Josselin] himself was delighted when his wife became pregnant some ten months after the wedding, and blessed the name of the Lord when ‘some hopes of my wives breeding’ proved to be well founded ‘to our great joy and comfort.’

Another indication of the high value generally accorded to children in medieval and early modern period is Josselin’s deep sorrow over the death of his fourth child soon after birth, which he described as “bitter as death.” Macfarlane also quotes Josselin as saying that his wife “weake and faint with the turning of her milke; yett blessed bee god finely upward in the day, and at night shee thought her milke was even gone away.”

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Such close emotional ties that characterized the parent-child relationship in Josselin’s household leads Macfarlane to overlook the forms of power exercised on children. As he finds no records of “a harsh authoritarian attitude or of the need for physical punishment” in Josselin’s treatment of his children, he criticizes those historians who depict children as being repressed by their parents, with no freedom of choice. But when Macfarlane encounters instances of harsh treatment of children, he simply attributes them to the variation in the personality of the parents. As he points out: “The actual territory of parent-child relations remains largely unexplored; it was, no doubt, a varied knowledge, the degree to which there was ‘more love than terror’ decided by the father’s character.” 90

Although there is no reason to doubt the presence of highly valued and well-protected children among the elite classes, as for example in Josselin’s household, it is doubtful whether the same conclusion can be drawn for all pre-modern children. In Macfarlane’s account, as in Pollock’s, there are no written records of how children of the poor, the illegitimate and the orphan were treated. This is not only because such records may have been absent, but also because their concept of childhood per se is founded on the omission of gender and class differences. Such an undifferentiated concept of childhood at the cost of ignoring its diversity virtually amounts to the elision of the lived experience of many children from history. As Laslett reminds us:

…crowds and crowds of little children are strangely absent from the written records…It is in fact an effort of the mind to remember that all the time that children always present in such numbers in the traditional world, nearly half the whole community living in a condition of semi-obliteration. 91

Some scholars have taken an intermediary position of combining nature with culture in a move to provide a more balanced approach to childhood. Shulamith Shahar is one such scholar who, in Children in the Middle Ages, examines the biological notion of childhood against various cultural influences with a view to determining changes in

91. Laslett, The World We Have Lost, 105.
the social perception of childhood. Although she does not see motherliness as “a fixed and imprinted pattern of conduct which is automatically manifested in the same form of circumstances”92, she nonetheless denies any such influences:

> It is only highly doubtful whether any ‘emotional evolution’ has occurred in the attitude of parents to their children, but also debatable whether the evolutionary model of constant and consistent advancement towards a more humane and enlightened theory of education is valid.93

If anything, in Shahar's conception of childhood, cultural influences are treated as unconnected events with no direct consequence on the ways in which children were perceived. This is apparent in her cursory reference to class differences among children that produced different experiences of childhood, but the experiences are never seen as worthy of developing alternative approaches to the study of childhood. They are seen as realities of the time, then and now, hence placed within a structural continuity that serves the biological formulation of childhood itself. In fact, as the role of culture pales to insignificance, there are also no considerable changes reported in the historical perspective on childhood.

This biological view of childhood, as James, Jenks and Prout have observed, is itself the by-product of “the late modern version of childhood” that “fails to adequately acknowledge the diversities in children’s everyday experiences, derived from gender, ethnicity and health status.”94 Their observation is seconded by Qvortrup, who poses the question: “Who can possibly claim there to be only one childhood when it is so obvious that children lead their life under a variety of conditions, depending not least on the socioeconomic background of their parental home?”95

In *Growing Up in Medieval London*, Barbara Hanawalt takes similar intermediary approach, but deviates from Pollock’s socio-biological determinism, as she

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94. James, Jenks and Prout, *Theorizing…*, 68.
includes different categories of children in her account of medieval children. This enlargement of the concept invariably introduces the element of culture into Hanawalt’s theoretical perspective. As she states: “For children to survive, they need not only be nursed, fed, and kept warm (biology), but also to be played with and talked to (culture), or they cannot be socialized.” Thus while in Hanawalt’s theory “biology plays a very basic role in shaping the cultural parameters of childhood”, the influence of culture is equally present.96 The latter constitutes part of her methodological insight for advancing a more comprehensive concept of childhood. She does this by turning to class and gender differences as the underlying causes behind the social differentiation between the elite/male children and the rest.

To Hanawalt, variations in childhood is a good indication of “the dominance of social over biological puberty”, and hence the presence of cultural influences in shaping childhood. As she points out: “society in the late middle ages extended the period of social childhood for males well into biological puberty and proportionately raised the age of exit from adolescence well into biological adulthood.” She adds education as yet another factor in prolonging the age of childhood. The point is made in conjunction with the growing demand on the part of many guilds for “functional literacy” that began in the fifteenth century. Here, she appears to concur with Ariès’ concept of childhood, as she proceeds to establish a connection between education and discipline.97

In conclusion, we need to delimit the biological confinement of childhood as much as we need to depart from the determinism of cultural constructionism. It is by introducing such a sense of proportion between culture and nature that we can arrive at an alternative view of childhood. As James, Jenks and Prout have rightly put it: “Children can no longer be routinely mistreated, but neither can they be left to their own devices. Within this discourse, then, children have become subjects.”98 This is an important move towards reaching an alternative view of childhood.

But in seeking this alternative, “a liberation from Ariès” may broaden our perspective.99 This concurs with what Prout and James describe as the “emergent paradigm” of childhood. Although the immaturity of children in this paradigm is brought into focus as “a biological fact of life”, it is also perceived as “a fact of culture.” It balances the relationship between the biological and cultural variables in the construction of childhood, by posing the question of authenticity i.e., “the extent to which childhood as a text can be understood independently of childhood as a stage of biological growth and maturity.”100 Ariès and others who have viewed childhood purely from the standpoint of social constructionism have overlooked this question.

Yet, the emphasis on the role of culture is to unravel the social construction of childhood as an institution, thus challenging the biological determinism associated with its universally perceived Western conceptualization. Prout and James rightly attack this mode of thought, which derives from psychological explanations of child development, but goes far beyond to influence the socio-political context of childhood. Its influence, they point out, is especially manifested in a close linkage between “biological facts of immaturity” and “the social aspects of childhood”, expressed in the language of “irrationality”, “naturalness”, and “universality” attributed to children. Accordingly, as Prout and James further note: “childhood through psychological discourses was translated directly into sociological accounts of childhood in the form of theories of socialization during the 1950s”, which portrayed children as “marginalized beings awaiting temporal passage, through the acquisition of cognitive skill, into the social world of adults.”101 Therefore, the naturalness with which children are depicted places them outside the social context, and ultimately reduces them from “human beings” to “human becomings.”102

Some advocates of Children’s Rights Movement see childhood as an oppressive invention, intended only “for adults’ convenience”, thus arguing for a full recognition of children’s autonomy in civil and legal terms. John Harris is an exponent

100. Prout and James, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, 26.
101. Prout and James, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, 26, 10-12.
of this view who asks for the full recognition of children’s rights. He argues that “if full political status is to be granted only to the competent, then a large and significant proportion of children must be granted full political status...” The argument is sustained by a universal notion of the individual freedom of choice which, he believes, should be granted to all regardless of age differences. To Harris, this is attained by an equal appreciation of “comprehensive capacities” in both adults and children as the criterion for dividing the line between “persons and non-persons.” The criterion of age difference for the possession of such capacities is only a false supposition, which he sees as perpetuating “the political disabling of children and the rule of adults.”

But whereas Harris advocates a substantial reduction in the age of assuming responsibility to enfranchise a large segment of children, his argument does not totally reject the biological reality of childhood. In fact, as John Holt acknowledges, “in one sense childhood is not an institution, but a fact of human life”, by which he means the child’s state of dependency on adults for survival. John Harris, who not only proposes age ten as the age for the liberation of children, but also makes certain activities age-dependent, equally acknowledges this point.

**Childhood as a Conjunction of Both Nature and Culture**

Thus, children’s maturity in social terms needs to be balanced by taking into consideration the interaction between the cultural and biological components of childhood, already noted in Prout’s and James’ alternative model. This is an important point which needs to be stressed, for while the social construction of childhood entrusts children with a role of agency in shaping their world, its recognition as a biological entity help us understand the limitations of such a role. The latter involves the fact of children’s dependency on adults, which Jens Qvortrup describes as a defining characteristic of childhood. Ivar Frønes also accentuates this dependency by pinpointing children’s inability to discern their interests. His recognition of children as a social category with

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individual personalities is not in conflict with his emphasis on the culture of negotiation within the nuclear family setting that “ensures children’s participation, emphasizes the position of the individual actor, and, at the same time underlies the democratic authority of the parents.”¹⁰⁷ In Prout’s and James’ statement: “Despite our recognition that children are active social beings, it remains true that their lives are almost always determined and/or constructed in large measure by adults.”¹⁰⁸

From this perspective, they propose a theory of action that accentuates the interrelationship between agency and social structure. This is primarily based on the reciprocity of the relationship between the two, with one exercising influence over the other: the former by having its impact on a complex web of human relationships, and the latter by imposing structural constrains on the individual’s freedom of action. Thus, while individuals are seen as “the creative agents of their own subjectively meaningful course of action”, they are at the same time constrained by “a sedimented network of interrelationships that itself acts to determine the conduct of individuals.” Accordingly, children as social actors constitute “a body of subjects”, but their course of action is neither “wilful” nor “capricious.”¹⁰⁹ It is rather determined by the interplay of the two constituents in a manner that is as much empowering as constraining.

In this way, Marx’s famous statement may be altered by stating that children too, make their own history, but not as they wish, but as they work within their biological confines. This would assume the form of a discourse that children often contrive in their opposition to the social world of the grown-ups, which, as it appears, “mutes their voices, denies their personhood, limits their potential.”¹¹⁰ If we agree with David Oldman’s view that adult-child relations are class based in both social and economic terms¹¹¹, the conflict arising from these relations take the forms of discourse and counter-discourse. This entails some recognition of the power and creativity of children’s imagination, seen for the most part in the acts of play and retelling stories. It is the latter form of expression

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¹⁰⁸. Prout and James, Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood, 30.
¹⁰⁹. James, Jenks and Prout, Theorizing ..., 201, 32.
¹¹⁰. Ennew, “Time for Children or Time for Adults?”, in Childhood Matters ..., 125.
that I shall focus on in order to illustrate the historical agency of childhood in the later part of this thesis.
Chapter III: From Folk Tales to Fairy Tales

Pondering the past 10,000 years of human history in terms of man’s relationship with the natural world, I. G. Simmons discerns a counter current which is marked by “comings-together as well as drawings-apart”.¹ This is a useful distinction to draw between the modern and pre-modern era. While from pre-historic to medieval times humans interacted with the animal kingdom, the modern world’s notion of civility relegated wilderness to oblivion.

The pre-modern era manifests itself in the primitive level of material and spiritual culture in line with the perennial effect of animals on the human psyche.² Here, animal instinct and human reasoning converge to constitute the dual human/bestial character. This is for the most part represented in folk tales and fables from both Western and Eastern cultures, which “were invented so that by imagining the speech of non-rational animals one to another, the customs and semblances of men might be known.”³ It is no wonder that “the reader is both entertained by the incongruity of animals acting like humans and disturbed by the ease with which human actions can be imputed to brute beasts.”⁴

The process of drawings-apart marks one of the most conspicuous features of our time that began with technological advancements of the early modern era. It is embodied in a disruption in human interaction with the animal kingdom and the suppression of one’s inner animal instinct. If anything, the modern world with its refined perception of the animal kingdom gave currency to a humanized manifestation of

animals and their habitats. What Jonas Frykman and Orvar Lofgren state in relation to the Swedish middle-class during the reign of King Oscar Fredrik (1872-1905) is generally true of modern society: “…because at the same time that people felt a growing intimacy with animals and developed anthropomorphic dialogues with them in theory, they distanced themselves from them in reality.”\(^5\) The distance is particularly measured by a sustained human effort to cast aside animal characteristics, while simultaneously suffusing those of pet animals with human attributes.

The trend is consistent with the age of modernity that began with a series of political, socio-economic, and cultural transformations. Paramount among them were the formation of absolutist states, the growth of commerce and industry, the rise of print culture, and the diffusion of a secular/scientific worldview, all of which irreversibly relegated oral popular culture to the realm of secondary. While the advent of print reduced the scope of oral expression, modern scientific thoughts and philosophical currents weakened its intuitional basis by challenging the authenticity of its conjectural knowledge. The developments were consistent with the cultural assertion of a new elite, the literati, who used modern scientific and literary discourses to establish its cultural and ideological superiority. To this end, they began imposing their cultural ethos over the entire society, focusing in particular on what Elias calls the refinement of manners. This set in motion a relentless war against the “riff-raff” and the ill-mannered, whose unruly and defiant behaviour was often described by their better sorts in bestial terms. This was in light of the fact that many aspects of oral popular culture, as Le Roy Ladurie shows, had close links to the natural world and the animal kingdom.\(^6\) Casting off one’s inner ‘bestiality’ was therefore the first necessary step towards civility, a measure that was to serve the interest of social conformity.

These changes set the context for a new mode of socialization which subjected children to strict discipline in tandem with the vagaries of the imperious elite male/adult.

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The emergence of fairy tales as a new literary genre in the early modern period was instrumental in giving rise to the new mode of socialization. Although the target audience of the fairy tale in its initial stages consisted mainly of the urban middle class and the aristocratic circles, it subsequently shifted its focus to children in an effort to mould young minds. Its effectiveness stemmed principally from the subtle but persuasive manner in which a particular moral dictum was conveyed through the enchanting stories of human contact with the animal kingdom and the world of fairies.

The anecdotal message inherent in these stories was embedded in a system of reward and punishment, which entailed one’s elevation to the highest status of humanity or regression to the lowest level of bestiality. This was part of the socialization scheme to disseminate through children’s stories the various facets of the dominant culture such as virtue, diligence, conscience, and honesty, first among children of the affluent classes and subsequently among those of the poor. The history of the fairy tale from Charles Perrault (1628 –1703) to Jacob Grimm (1785 -1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859), as we shall see in subsequent chapters, confirms the trend.

Seen in this light, the story of childhood is closely intertwined with the fairy tale, and both with modern Western civilization. As Joseph Zornado observes:

Seeing children’s stories as a cultural reproduction of the relationship between the adult and the child – determined as it is by the unconscious ideology harboured by the adult - offers a way of seeing diverse forms of children’s literature, human relationships, the story of Western culture, and the production and reproduction of the dominant ideology of Western culture as diverse expressions of the same story.7

This interplay of childhood and the fairy tale within the broader context of the civilizing process is central to the present thesis. But before delving into the actual inquiry, it is imperative to have an understanding of the chain of events that wrought a

major historical transformation in European History. One of the offshoots of this transformation was a shift from folktale to the fairy tale that signalled not only a transition from oral to the print culture, but also a change of focus from religious to secular issues. What follows next is a contextualization of the socio-historical changes that gave rise to both the modern concept of childhood and the literary genre of fairy tale.

The Age of Modernity

Contextualizing the medieval society, Lynn White remarks: “Antiquity had imagined the Centaur; the early Middle Ages made him the master of Europe.” David Levine elaborates the point as he adds: “The cornerstone of feudal society was the revolution in combat technology. This transformation in the means of violence had made mounted knights the rulers of others…” Both statements bring forth human reliance on animals that stood at the core of the feudal revolution of early medieval Europe. What is more, human interaction with the animal kingdom had its repercussion in a rather rowdy manner in which human sentiments were expressed. As Bernheimer observes: “the limits between wildness and knighthood were fluid and to become a gentleman the Wildman did not have to shed much of his savagery.” J. Huizinga’s description of the medieval society famously makes just this point:

All things presenting themselves to the mind in violent contrasts and impressive forms, lent a tone of excitement and of passion to everyday life and tended to produce that perpetual oscillation between despair and distracted joy, between cruelty and pious tenderness which characterize life in the Middle Ages.

The post-feudal transformation of Europe into a commercial and industrial order heralded the coming of a new age in which “animals became increasingly marginal

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to the process of production.” The event also laid the foundation for a new concept of humanity that defined itself in contradistinction to bestiality. In contrast to medieval society where unrestrained human passions were conducive to the daily occurrence of violence, the new age demanded a total reformation of manners in concert with new sets of cultural norms and moral standards. The rise of absolutist states following the feudal rivalries of the tenth and eleventh centuries in Europe and the monopolization of physical violence by a central authority set the trend. This unleashed the civilizing process that signalled the beginning of modern Western civilization. The process was accelerated by the advent of the printing press that gave rise to an entirely new social elite with its secular/scientific worldview, thus signalling the new era of modernity. The momentous change was a process, not an event; it did not occur at once but, rather, was protracted as well as being uneven in its development.

This socio-historical transformation began with the growing level of social expansion, fomented by land shortage and population increase, which in Elias’ account, caused society to become “differentiated”, to generate “new cells”, and to form “new organs, the towns.” Such was characteristic of an age of specialization where, owing to the increased centralization and “commercialization” of land control, the administration of power shifted from traditional warriors to a body of experts.

The control of the resources passing from the feudal household to public monopoly created an interdependent web of human relationships that constituted the institutionalized interdependencies between the central authority and a whole class of courtiers and state functionaries, drawn mostly from the warriors. There was also an initiative from the other end of the social hierarchy that had an impact on the nature of the central government. A case in point was the participation of the English peasants “in the crown’s provincial politics partly at least on their own terms and for their own ends,

and in the process they influenced both the form and content of these politics.\textsuperscript{14} This ultimately reduced the gulf between the ruler and the ruled, thereby forcing the sovereign to be “governed and functionally dependent on, the society he rules.”\textsuperscript{15} Gerald Harriss’ account of the shift from private to public domain is noteworthy:

Government thus ceased to be arcane or remote, something handed down by officials; it became something in which subjects were involved, something they learned to manipulate, criticize and even change. If we speak of “public authority” or “public administration” in the late Middle Ages, it cannot simply be equated with the interests of the crown; it was indeed public, but in the sense of operating in response to the needs of an informed and articulate political community alongside the crown.\textsuperscript{16}

Subsequent to the emergence of central authority, which began around 1200, was the state monopolization of violence by creating “pacified social spaces” that effectively altered the means of political struggle from the sword to words. As Elias notes, “through centralization and monopolization opportunities that previously had to be won by individuals through military or economic force, can now become amenable to planning.” This in turn initiated what Elias terms “a new spurt in civilization” which, though nothing more than “rationalization” or “long-term planning”, brought about “a change in human conduct and sentiment in a quite specific direction.” The change was already apparent in a varying degree of self-restraint, as “concentration of arms and armed men under one authority” had made the use of individual violence a matter of “foresight or reflection.”\textsuperscript{17} Most conspicuous was the alteration of the personality structure, which, as part of the mutation of the entire social structure, forced the


\textsuperscript{15} Elias, \textit{Power and Civility}..., 109-10.


\textsuperscript{17} Elias, \textit{Power and Civility}..., 114, 229, 239
individual “to regulate his conduct in an increasingly differentiated, more even and more stable manner.”

The growing tradition of troubadour poetry and minnesang at the great feudal courts was a symbolic manifestation of what was to come. Composing songs and reciting poetry in the praise of a lord and beauty of a noble lady, in the words of Elias, was “one of the ways open to those driven from the land, whether from the upper class or from the urban-rural lower class.” This new method of attaining social prestige had its cultural ramifications in two important ways. Not only did it signal the transformation of those representing physical violence into subservient and pacified individuals, it also introduced a more refined conception of human conviviality based on drive-control.

The latter effect particularly stemmed from the inferior status of the individual entertainers that formed “the basis of their song, their attitudes and their affective and emotional mould.” Such was especially the case with contacts between women of distinction and troubadours that ultimately resulted in the “transformation of pleasure, that shade of feeling, that sublimation and refinement of the affects that we call “love” comes into being.” Again as Elias reminds us, “it is only the relation of a socially inferior and dependent man to a woman of higher rank that leads to the restraint, renunciation and the consequent “transformation of drives.” The rationale was of course “the impossibility of attaining the desired woman” that led to the imposition of self-restraint on the part of the dependent man, an experience that necessitated “the need for circumspection and…, regulation and transformation of his elementary drives and need…”

This self-restraint was in stark contrast to the erstwhile knightly culture which permitted “the warrior extraordinary freedom in living out his feelings and passions”, and allowed “savage joys, the uninhibited satisfaction of pleasure from women.” Not surprisingly, the growing social importance of women, as noted by Elias, went hand in hand with the renunciation of physical violence.

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In due course, this made the use of violence and direct pleasure a matter of “greater chance” and “open fear”, forcing individuals to act against their natural tendencies. This was well expressed by Pere Maldonnat, who in 1621 declared with an air of hope that “the will should command the desires like the father. With the growing network of human interdependencies, the epochal shift in mentality gained momentum, approving of only the type of behaviour which was introspective, prudent, and above all free of violent passions. Consequently, “the more threatened” was “the social existence of the individual who gave way to spontaneous impulses and emotions”, while the greater was “the social advantage of those able to moderate their affects.”

This meant above all that the combat zone had now moved within the individual taking charge of his/her passions, with the objective to “balance between drive-satisfaction and drive-control.” Such was concurrent with the philosophical movement of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century that found expression in neo-Stoicism of the Belgian classical philologist and Humanist Justus Lipsius (1547-1606). Not only did Lipsius make human free will dependent on God’s intervening power, he also categorically rejected human passions and forms of material pleasure. Both aspects of the movement were symptomatic of a philosophical view that set the trend for the power of mind over body, a view that was embodied in human submission to God.

To Elias, this was rather a “psychologization” of human behaviour, a split in the personality structure, most clearly manifested in a dissonance between the realm of conscious acts and the world of fantasies. The dispassionate existence of the individual resulting from his/her confinement within the pacified social spaces certainly had its reflex. It found an outlet in the realm of fantasy where repressed emotions found free and fervent expression. This was the logical outcome of the conflict haunting the individual, and was as true of the emerging bourgeoisie as of the nobility. Thus, “on their way to becoming courtiers, the nobility reads novels of chivalry; the bourgeois contemplate violence and erotic passion in films.” Conversely, anything reminiscent of physical

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violence, even “the use of the knife at table, is banished from view or at least subjected to more and more precise social rules.”

If fantasy was an escape from the sway of social opinion, anxiety over loss of love and respect was a substitute for the fear associated with physical violence. In time, it encompassed all forms of human conducts which in one way or another deviated from the dominant social values. The clearest manifestation of this anxiety was the feeling of shame, a self-inflicted punishment consistent with the “agency of self-constraint”, which, in the words of Elias, “was implanted in the individual by others on whom he was dependent, who possessed power and authority over him.” Hence, the failure by the individual to act in accordance with the accepted norms would set off in him/her the “automatism” of fear and shame, which was nothing but a state of defencelessness against the perceived “gestures of superiority by others.”

These forms of anxiety constituted the discourse of the civilizing mission which used the metaphorical language of bestiality for its actual goal of erasing from human consciousness any vestige of natural inclinations, thereby relegating them to the realm of animal instincts. The metaphorical use of bestiality for human sexual acts, i.e. “the beast with two backs” was perhaps the clearest example of the manner in which uninhibited patterns of human behaviour were likened to acts of an inferior nature, suited only to the lesser beings and animals, especially as it often conjured up the horrific feeling of shame in the individual involved. But in truth, the metaphor was far more inclusive. It denoted the modern association between nature and the bestial domain both of which had to be tamed in order to serve the civilized man. In this respect, the remarks by Frykman and Lofgren are quite apposite: “Nature could symbolize the primitive and

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20. Elias, *Power and Civility*..., 236, 242. This does not however mean that violence completely vanished from society. For, as Robert Shoemaker points out in a relatively recent article, intense public violence between men and men in the form of duels and personal scuffles, caused primarily by affront to male honour, continued unabated until the late eighteenth century. See Robert Shoemaker, “Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence in Eighteenth- Century London”, *Social History* 26, no.2 (May 2001). It is therefore plausible to argue that Elias’ analysis only addresses the larger historical trend, drawn in the broadest of brush strokes, towards civility.

uncivilized forces in the world, as well as the unbridled animal urges that had to be repressed or disciplined.”

The existing literature of the early modern era bears witness to this new trend. A case in point was Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), who in his manual on manners uses the term civility in contradistinction to bestiality. Equating rustic manners with animal-like conduct, he cautions: “Don’t smack your lips, like a horse; don’t swallow your meat without chewing, like a Stork; don’t gnaw the bones, like a dog; don’t lick the dish, like a cat…”

This notion of physical cleanliness was yet another area where the distinction between humans and animals was made. John Stuart Mill, for example, declared that the absence of cleanliness, “more than anything else, renders man bestial.” Equally interesting were the remarks made by the novelist and playwright, Henry Fielding (1707-1754), who believed that it was “those great polishers of our manners, the dancing-masters”, who were “by some thought to teach what principally distinguishes us from the brute creation.” In short, as Keith Thomas points out: “Men attributed to animals the natural impulses they most feared in themselves - ferocity, gluttony, sexuality…” It was however around the issue of sexuality that the distinction was sharply made. As Thomas further notes: “In the bestiaries and emblem books a remarkably high proportion of the animals which appear are meant to symbolize lasciviousness or sexual infidelity.” To this end, he quotes Gerrard Winstanley, the seventeenth century egalitarian essayist who maintained that “sexual freedom was the freedom of wanton unreasonable beasts.”

The elite’s use of bestiality for such seemingly degrading acts as sexual bluntness was no doubt a way of regulating human conduct. After all, sexuality, as Frykman and Lofgren state, “links us to the animals and is consequently a threat to civilized life and the rational social order.” Yet, the term bestiality denoted more than a mere attempt at the reformation of manners. It was also part of an anthropocentric worldview aimed at subjugating the natural world, and of an overall discourse of

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24. Frykman and Lofgren, *Culture Builders...*, 243-44.
domination to which the poor, the underclass, women and children, were all subjected. What’s more, in pursuing their ambitious project of conquering the planet and its inhabitants, the elite men of the early modern Europe went further to subjugate a host of other people outside their geographical purview. Here too, bestiality was the term used to bring in line the exotic people whose eccentric behaviour defied the cultural universe of the white/male elite. In this way, the Western world, equipped with the language of reason and obsessed with social conformity, ushered in a “grimace of terror, renewed rites of purification and exclusion.” Thomas’s exposition on both accounts is revealing:

In drawing a firm line between man and beast, the main purpose of early theorists was to justify hunting, domestication, meat eating, vivisection…. and the wholesale extermination of vermin and predators. But this abiding urge to distinguish the human from the animal also had important consequences for relations between men. For, if the essence of humanity was defined as consisting in some specific quality, then it followed that any man who did not display that quality was subhuman, semi-animal.

Subsequently, bestiality as a metaphor of domination found expression in the scientific and philosophical discourses of the post-Renaissance era. Paramount among them was the Cartesian doctrine of human uniqueness that refashioned the age-old Aristotelian conception of man as rationally and spiritually distinct from and superior to other creatures. It changed the nature of human relationship with the natural world from dialogue to full exploitation. Men shall be both “the lords and possessors of nature”, anticipated René Descartes, as he advanced his mechanical view of the non-human sentient derived from the idea of beast-machine. Not only did Descartes present animals as “mere machines or automata, devoid of mind and soul, and incapable of reasoning, cognition, and even sensation”, he also “pushed the European emphasis on the gulf between man and beast to its logical conclusion.” Cartesian reasoning, as it dominated

the intellectual current of the time, served as a vindication of the growing human mastery over the living world in an age of increased scientific and industrial pursuits. As Thomas points out: “By denying the immortality of beasts, it removed any lingering doubts about the human right to exploit the brute creation.”

**The Elite Depiction of Women as Bestial**

Excluded from humanity were also women, who were conceived of as “misbegotten” males and worse as bestial beings. Their debasement in so degrading terms had its roots in the Aristotelian taxonomy of opposition and Pythagorean dualities, which, as Denise Riley observes, linked them “with imperfection, left, dark, evil and so on.” A late medieval poem, entitled “the Voices of Women”, said it all:

> Woman is a snake to be venomous.  
> Woman is a lion for imperiousness.  
> Woman is a Leopard to devour.  
> Woman is a Fox to deceive.  
> Woman is a bear to be combative.  
> Woman is a dog to have sharp senses.  
> Woman is a cat to bite with teeth.  
> Woman is a rat to destroy.  
> Woman is a mouse to be sneaky.

This soul-centred deposition of women’s inferiority continued well into the modern era, primarily because the dismal female sex had now become an indication of the Cartesian mechanical formula of bestiality. George Fox, the seventeenth-century Quaker and an advocate of gender equality, recounted of “a body of persons holding the strange opinion that women possessed no souls, no more than a goose”. Similar remarks

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were made by contemporary medical experts, who accentuated the animal aspects of childbirth.31

By the Age of Enlightenment, the rationale for the social exclusion of women shifted its focus. It was now the absence of reason rather than soul in the female mind that came to be seen as the locus of women’s inferiority. While “embedded in natural wisdom”, declared Jean Jacques Rousseau, women still lacked “the self-reflectivity of rationality”, a presumption that led him to argue: “Women do wrong to complain of the inequality of man-made laws; this inequality is not men’s making, or at any rate it is not the result of mere prejudice, but of reason.”

What defined ‘reason’ was a language that set itself apart from all that seemed natural. Inherent in the definition was the ongoing battle between human intellect and the forces of nature, which from the perspective of the Enlightenment thinkers would end in the subjugation of the latter by the former. In this respect, the association of women with the natural and hence with unreason “to a point of mutual implication”, to use Riley’s expression, not only meant that Nature was “the fixed hierarchies of the social order”, but that women were “the embodiment of this ordered nature.”32 This depiction of women as rationally inferior in the Age of Reason found expression in a sexualized discourse, especially as nature increasingly came to be described in feminine terms. On this account, Paula Mc Dowell’s statement is pertinent: “The transition from seventeenth – and early eighteenth – century female polemicists’ notion of human inferiority as collective, social, and essentially unsexed to the gendered self of modern liberal individuation did not bring freedom and equality.”33

Equally excluded from humanity were children or in Thomas’s observation “other animals nearer home”, whose unrestrained passions in a civilized and rationally-oriented society branded them as bestial characters. The consignment of children to the bestial realm was in fact concomitant with the view of John Moore, a leading Jacobean

31. Thomas, Man and the Natural World..., 43.
32. Riley, Am I That Name?..., 36-38.
The Colonial Era and the Global Conquest

The Cartesian creed of human superiority, as accounted by Thomas, had its ramifications in the domination of the world and its habitants. If the white/male elite as the personification of the new concept of humanity were to conquer the natural world, they also took upon themselves to demonize and vanquish the beastlike multitude. To this end, the elite characterization of the inferior others as bestial was introduced into the cultural arena of class warfare. The remarks by Sir Thomas Pope Blount, the seventeenth century English baronet, speak to the point:

The numerous rabble that seem to have been the signatures of man in their faces are but brutes in their understanding…tis by the favour of a metaphor we call them men, for at the best they are but Descartes’ automata, moving frames and figures of men, and have nothing but their outsides to justify their titles to rationality.36

Blount identified the beastlike as “the poor – ignorant, irreligious, squalid in their living conditions and notably lacking in some of the accomplishments supposed to be distinctively human: letters, numbers, manners and a developed sense of time.”37 A similar view was held by William Lilly, the seventeenth century astrologer, who believed that the poor were “the vile and brutish part of mankind”, since their livelihood was “bestial”, for they “consorted together” like “brutes”, who “spent all day seeking food.”38

36. Cited in Thomas, Man and the Natural World..., 43-44.
37. Sir Thomas Pope Blount, A Natural History (1693), sig. A6, cited in Thomas, Man and the Natural World..., 44.
38. Cited in Thomas, Man and the Natural World..., 44.
With capitalist expansion beyond the boundaries of Western Europe, guided by an ambitious anthropocentrism and a civilizing mission, the politics of domination was extended to a host of others. characterized as “barbarians” and “less human” those who fell outside this “virtuous” and “superior civilization.”\(^{39}\) What was hitherto a parochial project of exercising control over the home environment and its underprivileged dwellers now turned into a venture for conquering the entire planet. This resonated with the Christian claim to the uniqueness of divine truth which was in stark contrast to the religious pluralism of the pagan culture. It created its own category of inferior multitude who did not submit to an all-pervasive concept of spiritual redemption.

Here again, bestiality was the preferred language that served to demonize and dominate the “primitive” peoples to the extent of divesting them of their territories and resources. Thus, in 1609 Robert Gray, the English writer, grumbled that “the greater part of the earth was possessed and wrongfully usurped by wild beasts…or by brutish savages, which by reason of their godless ignorance, and blasphemous idolatry, are worse than those beasts.”\(^{40}\) Such was also the opinion of the Earl of Clarendon who lamented, “…the greatest part of the world is yet inhabited by men as savage as the beasts who inhabit with them.” Others like Sir Thomas Herbert (1606-1682), the English traveller and author, went even further in dehumanizing the natives. He described the inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope, whom he described as having “no better predecessors than monkeys”, and whose words as sounding “rather like apes than men…” In much the same way, a Jacobean clergy thought of the Hottentots as “beasts in the skin of man.” In sum, the “primitive” people were, as a later traveller reported, “filthy animals” who “hardly deserve the name of rational creatures.”\(^{41}\) Others like Sir Francis Wyatt, the governor of Virginia showed a much stronger aversion to the Native Americans when in 1623 he declared: “Our first work is the expulsion of the savages… for it is infinitely

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\(^{41}\) Thomas, *Man and the Natural world...*, 42.
better to have no heathen among us, who were at best as thorns in our sides, than to be at peace and league with them.” 42

Subsequently, in establishing their supremacy over the inferior multitude both at home and abroad, the power elite turned to literacy whose “primary function”, in the words of Lévi-Strauss, was “to facilitate the enslavement of human beings.”43 This found a symbolic expression in a play in which a “Spanish priest beats the Indians with his Bible”, an act that presented “a graphic portrayal of the Andean experience of Christianity and writing as a brutal imposition.”44

Viewed in this context, the “desire to tame and educate became in a time of increasingly democratic politics a rationale for imperialism, Caesarism, anti-Semitism, and other forms of political violence.”45 On this account, the introduction of literacy among the unlettered and the colonized other had the double purpose of regulating their behaviour as well as making them submit to the ideological domination of the Western world. The point is well illustrated by Margaret Spufford who observes: “if you could read, you were also religiously indoctrinated.”46

Joy Wiltenburg’s reading of the Carolina Penal Code of 1532 unveils the discriminatory nature of class and gender politics as well as the colonial projects which were intensified with the diffusion of literacy and the print culture: “Both authoritative and literary text used print to promote identification with a universal ideal, limited by class and gender but discursively as common to all reasonable people.”47 This is what Walter D. Mignolo refers to as a Western endeavour at ‘occidentalization of the globe’,

42. Pagden, Lords of the world..., 37.
which by equating alphabetical writing with ‘civilization’ aimed to undermine an alternative sign system as remnant of a ‘primitive’ culture and pagan religion.48

This advocacy of print culture’s supremacy resulted in the onslaught against the symbolic universe of the socially marginalized and the vanquished whose culture was rooted in oral tradition. Like other discourses of domination, the onslaught against oral culture went hand in hand with the debasement of the unlettered to a lower status. Father Bernabé Cobo, the Spanish missionary, was quite vigorous in advancing the new discourse when in 1653 he described the Andeans as obtuse on the twin grounds of lacking in “writing, sciences, arts” and “engrained savage vices.”49 No less disdaining was the remark by Mercier de la Riviere, the eighteenth century French liberal thinker, who stated: “Their blindness place them lower than brutes making them more miserable than animals, more difficult to lead, and more tempestuous…”50 Similarly, Montesquieu, the advocate of natural rights, did not hesitate to endorse slavery in relation to the inferior others. Indeed, in his *L’ Esprit des lois*, he contended that “while ‘peoples of the North’ were in a ‘coerced state’ if they were not free, most people in warmer zones were in fact in a ‘violent’ state if they were not enslaved.”51

The inference drawn from these claims suggests that the unlettered and godless inhabitants of the exotic lands had to be subjugated at the same time that the ignorant pagan folks at home were subjected to a systematic repression. Both had to be demonized and forced to cast aside their animal instincts and conjectural vision of the world. What the exasperated Sir Benjamin Rudyerd, as stated in the House of Commons in 1628, echoed the desire of the world masters to dominate the exotic and inferior others: “…there were places in England which were scarce in Christendom, where God was little

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49. Quoted in Classen, “Literacy As Anticulture…”, 411.
known than amongst the Indians.”"^52 Centuries later in 1856, Henry Harrison, the editor of _The Western Flying Post_, echoed a similar view, remarking:

> We are sending Missionaries and schoolmasters to the negro’s of our West India Colonies to warn them against the atrocious deceptions of Mandrin, the Obahman, and are seeking, by the same excellent means, to guard the benighted Hindoo against the wizard’s in far East; but here we have, in a large manufacturing town, in our own highly favoured country, ignorance and credulity even more profound than that of the East, or of the West."^53

**The Advent of Print and the Rise of the Elite Culture**

The cultural domination of the Western male elite over the inferior multitude entered a new phase with the predominance of the written over the spoken word. This is where the role of the print culture becomes important in the cultural transformation of Europe. While it is true that the literate elite had always existed, their ascendance as the disseminators of modern ideas had to do with the advent of the printing press. As the Renaissance scholar, Gilmore accounts:

> The invention and development of printing with movable type brought about the most radical transformation in the condition of the intellectual life in the history of western civilization. It opened new horizons in the education and in the communication of ideas. Its effects were sooner or later felt in every department of human science."^54

The mechanism at work was the alteration in “methods of data collection, storage and retrieval systems and communications networks”, all of which inevitably made the literate elite independent of oral transmission. This irreversibly superseded “the

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texture of the scribal culture”, which was still “governed by reliance on the spoken word.” What appeared as its substitute was “a hybrid half-oral, half-literate culture” that has “no precise counterpart today.”

55 Marshal McLuhan has characterized the shift as a “split between heart and head” – a major social and psychological change that made reading the dominant medium of public discourse.

56 Though not a kind of shift wrought by the transformation from an oral into a literate culture but a movement “from one kind of literate culture to another”, the printed page undoubtedly helped establish the cultural supremacy of the intellectual elite over the inarticulate majority. I shall come back to this later; but for now, I only refer to the immediate role of the printing press in further diffusing the written word. This proved advantageous to the literary elite who found in the new technology the prospect of proliferating and publicizing their viewpoints. It was in this context that Martin Luther hailed Gutenberg’s invention “as God’s highest and extremist act of grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward.”

Paradoxically, this divinely ordained instrument of amplifying the spoken word contained a strong predisposition towards undermining religious orthodoxy. As Jack Goody states, the proliferation of religious texts “made it possible to scrutinize discourse in a different kind of way by giving oral communication a semi-permanent form” and “this scrutiny favoured the increase in the scope of critical activity, and hence of rationality, scepticism, and logic.”

58 Thus, William Tyndale (1494-1536), the first dissident cleric to translate the Bible into English, declared: “I defy the pope and all his laws…If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of the scripture than thou dost.”

59 Similarly, his biographer John Foxe (1516-1587), a cleric turned dramatist and editor, stated that “preachers, players, and printers…be set up god, as a triple bulwark against the triple crown of the pope, to bring

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That an obscure theologian in Wittenberg succeeded in shaking Saint Peter’s throne can only be attributed to the power of the printing press.

This latter effect was of particular relevance, in that it set the stage for the emergence of a broad spectrum of literary elite, ranging from the scholar-printer to editor-translator and publisher. Equally relevant was the pressure of the new medium of communication for change, especially as it involved exponents of religious conservatism whose ideas “could not be transmitted in traditional ways” but in a completely new fashion that was “not conservative at all.” This was characteristic of a movement which, in the words of Eisenstein, was inspired by “a return to early Christian Church traditions”, but paradoxically under the new social impulses it “served to usher in modern times.”

It was no coincidence that the quest for religious dogma turned into an intellectual pursuit, a trend which brought religious and secular elite together vis-à-vis the ‘wicked’ and ‘the ignorant’.

One of the most far-reaching effects of the printing press was its exclusionary character that sharpened the distinction between the literati and the inarticulate multitude. For, the very act of writing, as Walter J. Ong points out, “is diaeretic” which “divides and distances all sorts of things in all sorts of ways.”

It accelerated the process of social distanciation, i.e., the separation of the hearing public from “the well-informed men of affairs” who “had to spend part of each day in temporary isolation from his fellow men.”

There was yet another disjunctive factor, namely the price system associated with typography as a portable commodity, thanks in large measure to the monopolistic nature of the coterie controlling the market for the new technology.

The distance between the spoken and printed word was just one of the many indications of the growing social polarization which became a defining feature of the

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60. King, “The Light of Printing...”, 56.
64. A detailed discussion of these two factors is provided by Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety: 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 257-64.
early modern era. Because, literacy and print culture “proved, in turn, a test of class.”

The precise moment began with a fusion between the opinions voiced in the printed materials and the social and political aspirations of the new middle classes. The tenacity of this fusion became especially apparent in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the language of the reading public shifted from Latin to French and other vernacular languages. Though not completely altering one’s intellectual orientation, the function of print was “to confirm prejudices, to fan the political flames.” In this way, the printed page, as Ray Porter notes, primarily addressed “the converted” who “like newspaper readers bought items which reflected their own pre-existing political views.” What Algernon Sidney (1622-1683), the English commentator, stated in relation to print was not merely a political demand; it pointed, inter alia, to the unison between the ambition of the rising middle class and the function of the printing press. “If it be lawful for us…to invent printing, with an infinite number of other arts beneficial to mankind”, he argued, “why have we not the same right in matters of government, upon which all others do almost absolutely depend?” A similar view was expressed by Francis Bacon, who urged that his own writings and proposals be made available to “some fit and selected minds.”

On the other hand, the initial irrelevance of the printed opinions to the oral community forced many local cultures to retain much of “the spontaneity and gritty intimacy of its origin in a back alley sub-culture.” As a seventeenth century priest in Sologne observed: “They only love their own region (leur pays)...they are not interested in the news or the fashions of other parts, but are quite detached from everything that happens in the rest of the world.” This had much to do with the closed geographical setting within which oral culture was shaped. As late as the first half of the nineteenth

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century, the peasant’s experience and knowledge of the world, as Alan Baker notes in the French context, “was largely confined to his commune and its canton, rarely extending beyond his pays.” 72

The Interplay of Print and Oral Culture

We should not however think of early modern Europe in terms of a binary opposition between print and oral cultures. We need to understand “not only points of conflict and displacement” between the emerging literate classes and popular classes, “but also areas of consensus and gradual integration.” 73 It is prudent to view the two modes of communication as overlapping subcultures with regional variations, which result from “fluid circulation, practices shared by various groups, and blurred distinctions.” 74 Cultural identity along class lines, with the patrician elite identifying with print while all the plebeians held onto oral traditions does not stand up to the test of historical scrutiny.

Viewed in this sense, the cultural universe of the unlettered was not necessarily confined to oral communication. To think otherwise would simply ignore the various forms in which class solidarity and conflict find expression. For, “identity is never monolithic or static”, and that “oral tradition, unlike writing, can be very radically reshaped by changes in social, political and cultural contexts, and can fall into oblivion without acts of conscious destruction.” 75 The last remark is of special importance here. It conveys the now accepted view that, far from being fashioned by the intellectual charity of the privileged few, the popular reception of print culture was spontaneous in character. As Watt notes: “The godly ballads, broadsides and chapbooks are artefacts of the process

73. Watt, Cheap Print and Popular Piety..., 325.
by which these standards were articulated, disseminated, absorbed, modified, adapted and reflected.”

It is therefore important to dwell on this topic, not least because Gutenberg’s revolutionary invention did not at once result in the fading of oral culture. Rather, both oral and print cultures continued to coexist and even intermingled until the nineteenth century when, thanks to broadened literacy, printing finally emerged as the dominant medium of communication. At the conspiracy trial of Gracchus Babeuf and the Equals during the revolutionary upheavals in France, there was difference of opinion over whether or not stenographers should transcribe testimony which was resolved by a court motion allowing for both oral and written depositions. This is in keeping with the view that although the French Revolution, as Laura Mason maintains, “hastened the advance of textuality, it gave birth to a riot of oral expression – speeches, oaths, songs, and declarations…”

The study by Adam Fox, _Oral and Literate Culture in England_, concurs with the above assertion. He shows quite convincingly that “speech, script and print infused and interacted with each other in myriad ways” Using the example of _The Hunting of the Cheviot_, commonly known as Chevy Chase, Fox declares:

> Chevy Chase was already the product of a long series of interactions between oral, manuscripts, and print culture. What probably began in manuscript form passed into oral circulation and eventually into print. From print it passed back again into manuscript and lived on in the mouths of minstrels and their audiences.

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76. Watt, _Cheap Print and Popular Piety…_, 327.
78. Mason, “‘The ‘Bosom of Proof’…”, 32.
80. Fox, _Oral and Literate Culture …_, 3.
Accordingly, there was a trend that sought to retain oral culture through imbibing the print technology. In Fox’s observation: “Memory could be short and legends might fall out of use when they ceased to conform to the aspirations and sensibilities of new generations.” As such, the print acted as “an obstacle to the acceptance of many new views”, simply “by popularizing long cherished beliefs, strengthening traditional prejudice and giving authority to seductive fallacies.” Thus remarked the Bordeaux lawyer Pierre Bernaudau when describing the reading habit of the eighteenth century French peasants: “They have a mania for going back over these miserable books twenty times, and when they talk with you about them (which they do eagerly), they recite their little books word for word, so to speak.”

The habit of using the printed page as an aid to memory had its impact on oral popular culture. It led to the emergence in the seventeenth century of an overwhelmingly large but distinctive body of cheap print such as broadsides, penny books, printed ballads and chapbooks. Although the growing specialization in cheap printed materials was in response to a potentially lucrative market for print, it nonetheless “reflected the needs of a partially literate society.” An important offshoot of this interaction between the print and oral cultures was the assimilation of Protestant doctrine by conservative piety, which accounted for continued existence of religion amongst ‘the irreligious multitude.’

There was yet another dimension to the mélange of the two cultures, one with a forward looking. Robert Greene’s publications were of this nature. The proliferation of works both in his life time (1560-1592) and posthumously was in many ways indicative of a movement in which printed materials passed from “the cultural mainstream to cultural marginality.” The passage had much to do with the popularity of his romances like *Pandosto*, which irreversibly turned the printing press into a rallying point for the socially divergent groups. This was evident from his attraction of a motley audience who

84. Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety...*, 257.
included not only men and women of distinction, but the naïve and semi-literate. Among the latter were people of such low-status as a chambermaid whom a contemporary account described as a frequent reader of Greene’s works. Similarly, Henry Parrot’s testimony in 1615 stated that the patronage for bookstall rushing to purchase Greene’s works consisted of “Your Countrey-Farmer” and “my Serving man.” In yet another report by Richard Niccols in 1614, Greene’s aficionados were characterized, though with a somewhat anxiety-ridden tone, as “idle humorists” and “the vulgar” who thronged “a Stationers Shop”, a phenomenon which he viewed as “a piece of infection.”

Another indication of the popular turn to print culture in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was the wide reception of John Lyly’s *Euphues and his England*. Lyly himself proclaimed in his 1580 preface to the text that *Euphues* had swiftly passed from the stylish lady reader’s “laps” to her “wayting Maydes.” Of particular importance here was the role of vernacular language in providing exposure to those with limited literacy, which at times proved to be subversive. Thus, when the Inquisitor in a Lyon prison in 1553 perceived a “heretic” artisan as an ignorant commoner, the latter could retort: “God through me by His Holy Spirit…. It belongs to all Christians to know it in order to learn the way to Salvation.”

The emergence in the sixteenth century of the books of secrets in Europe, notably in Italy, further resulted in the spread of print culture to a socially diverse reading public. Being essentially “technical ‘how-to’ books rather than works of theoretical science”, the authors of these books, often of non-academic backgrounds, served as intermediaries between oral and print cultures. The publication of their hitherto secret recipes into books of secrets in large quantities and in cheap editions attracted a wide range of audience both literate and semi-literate. As Girolamo Ruscelli, a sixteenth century Italian author emphasized in his preface to *secreti nuovi* emphasized:

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86. Newcomb, “‘Social Things’…”, 758, 763, 777.
…we devoted ourselves equally to the benefits of the world in general and in particular, by reducing to certainty and true knowledge so many useful and important secrets of all kinds for all sorts of people, be they rich or poor learned or ignorant, male or female, young or old...\textsuperscript{89}

\textbf{Social Polarization within a Shared Medium of Communication}

The interdependence of print and orality characteristic of early modern Europe should not obscure class conflict between the elite and subordinate classes. In fact, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries bear witness to growing social polarization along class lines rather than modes of communication. This is in keeping with the existing historical evidence, especially those pertaining to the writings of Thomas Muntzer (1489-1525), the sixteenth century radical German theologian. For Muntzer, “the basic distinction between the elite and popular culture rested…not on the distinction between those confined to an oral culture and those having access to the world of the printed word.”\textsuperscript{90} Rather, it was rooted in “the class-articulated distinction between the Latinate culture of the clergy and the vernacular culture of the subordinate classes, whether literate or illiterate."\textsuperscript{91} This concurs with what Martin Parker, an alehouse-keeper and a popular writer, said of the readers of his ‘penny-sized’ books of the 1620s and 30s: the “honest folks that have no lands, the young maids feeling in their bosoms for two pence wrapt in clouts.”\textsuperscript{92}

The above considerations suggest that the popular turn to print culture did not in itself mark a break with oral popular culture, but an extension of the same cultural preferences in print form. The elite’s bias against broadsides and ballads as vulgar and lacking authority speaks to the point.\textsuperscript{93} This can be easily deduced from the suppression of many chap-books in 1621 by Maximilian Van Eynatten, a canon of Antwerp, who

\textsuperscript{89} Girolamo Ruscelli, \textit{Secreti nuovi di maravigliosa virtù...}, Venezia, eredi di Marchiò Sessa, 1567, quoted in Eamon, “Science and Popular Culture in Sixteenth Century Italy…”, 477.
\textsuperscript{90} Michael G. Baylor, “On the Front Between the Cultures: Thomas Muntzer on Popular and Learned Culture”, \textit{History of European Ideas} 11, Special Issue, (January 1989): 527.
\textsuperscript{91} Baylor, “On the Front Between the Cultures …”, 527.
\textsuperscript{92} Watt, \textit{Cheap Print and Popular Piety...}, 324.
\textsuperscript{93} For a discussion of this see Charles Elkins, “The Voice of the Poor: The Broadside as a Medium of Popular Culture and Dissent in Victorian England”, \textit{Journal of Popular Culture} 14, no. 2 (Fall 1980): 263-65.
found in them allusions to magic. A case in point was the ill-fated *Four Sons of Aymon* that was damned for its celestial attribution to Maugis, uncle of the four sons.\textsuperscript{94} Likewise, the diffusion of popular customs and beliefs through newspapers especially in eighteenth-century England was yet another indication of the manner in which printing served to perpetuate the embattled popular culture. As Robert Southey (1774-1843) stated: “The reason why these scoundrels [the popular classes] succeeded in to so much greater extent in England than in any other country, is because they are enabled to make themselves so generally known by means of the newspapers.”\textsuperscript{95}

Southey was of course right, for even when the newspapers raised the issues of magic and witchcraft with a view to erasing them from popular consciousness, they at the same time contributed to the popularity of such beliefs. As late as 1893, a girl from Dunster, after reading various comments on witchcraft could address the editor of a west Somerset paper in the following terms:

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Dear sir, - Seeing in your paper last week something about witchcraft, and I feel interested in it, as I have got my parents ill, and they are losing their stock, and I am writing to ask you if you know the address of the old woman that is said to live 2 miles this side of Bridgewater, that I could write to her on the people that put it in your paper, and perhaps I could get the address from them. I have enclosed stamped envelope, waiting your earnest reply and staiting cost for kindest trubble sincerely yours.\textsuperscript{96}
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It was the diffusion of the contesting values through the printed page that more than the printing press itself played a part in the course of European cultural divide. An indication of this divide was the sharpening distinction between “the Christianity of the elite” and “the Christianity-magic-animism of the masses”, which became a symbolic manifestation of the widening gap between popular and learned cultures. The statement by Father Philippe Bosquier, (1561-1636) a French Franciscan, in condemnation of

\textsuperscript{94} Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 210.
\textsuperscript{95} Quoted in Davies, “Newspapers and the Popular Belief…”, 153.
\textsuperscript{96} Quoted in Davies, “Newspapers and the Popular Belief…”, 153.
forms of popular festivity was only indicative of what was already taking place and what
was yet to come: “… I would not dare write in the vulgar tongue of the indecencies of
the festivities of Faunus, nor of the saturnalia and floralia, celebrated by stark naked
whores and by men in similar [un]dress.”

Bosquier’s statement resonated with the self-portrayal of the ruling elite, who
viewed themselves as the carriers of a great tradition, while at the same time looking
down upon popular culture as one of play and entertainment. Such class polarization in
cultural terms gained currency with the withdrawal in the course of the seventeenth and
eighteenth centuries of the nobility and ecclesiastical leaders from participating in
ritualized carnivals and religious festivities. This was in contrast to the past when “the
men of the Middle Ages participated in two lives: the official and the carnival life. Two
aspects of the world, the serious and the laughing aspect, coexisted in their
consciousness.” Peter Burke provides us with a sense of the participation of the elite
classes, including the royal dignitaries in popular festivities.

In Ferrara in the late fifteenth century, the Duke joined in the fun, going masked
in the streets and entering private houses to dance with the ladies. In Florence
Lorenzo de Medici and Niccolo Machiavelli took part in carnival. In Paris in
1583, Henri III and his suite ‘went about the street masked, going from house to
house and committing a thousand insolences.’ In the carnivals of Nuremberg in
the early sixteenth century, the patrician families played a prominent part. Festive
societies like the Abbey of Conrads at Rouen or the Compagnie de la mere Folle
at Dijon were dominated by the nobles, but still performed in the street for
everyone. Henry VIII went to the woods on May Day, just like other young men.
The Emperor Charles V took part in Bull-fights during festivals, and his great-
grandson Philip IV loved to watch them. …In towns at least, rich and poor, nobles
and commoners attended the same sermons. Humanists poets like Poliziano and

(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 159-160.
98. An excellent account of this cultural alliance between the divergent social classes is provided by Burke,
*Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 24-28.
(Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), 86. See Also H. Birkhan, “Popular and Elite Culture Interlacing in the
Pontano have recorded the fact that they stood in the piazza like everyone else to hear the singer of tales, the cantastorie, and that they enjoyed the performance. Leading seventeenth-century poets like Malherbe and C.P. Hooft enjoyed folksongs. Among the lovers of ballads were kings and queens like Isabella of Spain, Ivan the Terrible of Russia, and Sophia of Denmark…

The historical mutation of the early modern period would slowly put an end to this shared culture, now perceived insensitively as vulgar. The Reformation movement with its emphasis on a new concept of religious piety had initiated the trend. It forced the more pious to distance themselves from the impious masses. George Gascoyne, the Sixteenth Century moralist and literary figure, insisted that “the unthriftye Artificer, or the labourer” not be “permitted to syt bybbing and drinking of Wine in every Tavern”, arguing that it would be “folly to stand so much upon these mean personages, who for lack of wytte of good education, may easily be enclyned to things undecent.” For this reason he warned that “our gentrie, and the better sort of our people, were not so much acquainted with quaffing, carowing, and drinking of harty draughtes.”

The social differentiation along with religious lines led to the emergence of a new priestly style that cut off the individual priest from secular life altogether. In Delumeau’s account, the rural priest in France “no longer danced on popular holidays, was a stranger to the tavern, wore the tonsure and the cassock…He was no longer ‘of the world’, he was above his parishioners.” This cultural divide in modern European history is again described by Burke in the following terms:

The clergy, the nobility and the bourgeoisie had their own reason for abandoning popular culture…. The old – style parish priest who wore a mask and danced in

church at festivals and make jokes in the pulpit was replaced by a new – style priest who was better-educated, higher in social status, and considerably more remote from his flock. …Noblemen were learning to exercise self-control, to behave with a studied nonchalance, to cultivate a sense of style, and to move in a dignified manner as if engaging in a formal dance. Treatises on dancing also multiplied and court dancing diverged from country dancing. Noblemen stopped eating in great halls with their retainers and withdrew into separate dining– room (not to mention ‘drawing – rooms’). They stopped wrestling with their peasants, as they used to do in Lombardy, and they stopped killing bulls in public, as they used to do in Spain. The noblemen learned to speak and write ‘correctly’, according to formal rules, and to avoid the technical terms and the dialect words used by craftsmen and peasants. As their military role declined, the nobility had to find other ways of justifying their privileges: They had to show they were different from other people. The polished manners of the nobility were imitated by officials, lawyers and merchants who wanted to pass for noblemen. 104

Equally consequential was economic transformation and, especially, court life that wrought complexity and variegation within the established order. The Renaissance was a turning point, since by then the European elite had, by virtue of its economic affordability, “turned from ‘their frugal and military way of living’ to ‘the pursuit of refined and expensive pleasures’, to ‘vicious appetite’ to ‘prodigious expense’, to ‘an expensive way of living’, and in a word, to ‘luxury’.”105 This is best seen in the cultural transformation ending in the age of the Enlightenment when “the premises of Baroque elite culture piety, honor, privilege, blood, ritual, magic symbolic politics – gave way to an Enlightenment culture premised on gentility, moderation, leisure, secularism, toleration, and education.” In general, while the elite mentality embraced “a culture of ease presupposing wealth, leisure, and education”, “the lowly seemed lowly – economically poor, culturally limited, morally deficient, politically incapable.”106

104. Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, 271.
The War on Popular Culture

At the same time that the elite classes ceased to take part in the culture of the subordinate classes, they also began to wage a relentless war on them. It was expressed in a scornful attitude towards the customs and traditions of the common folks which not only conveyed their own sense of class pride but also unveiled a growing tendency to alter the unruly aspects of popular classes. In a word, the recalcitrant multitude had to be despised first before being taught to respect social conformity. The onset of ‘social disciplining’, which entailed “a sweeping social metamorphosis, the reinforcement of family structures… and the rigid redefinition of sexual boundaries”, was originally defined in light of a revised Christian belief system that meticulously brought the community of faithful under surveillance.

Accordingly, there followed a two-phase movement by a coterie of ecclesiastical and secular elites against the cultural universe of their inferior others. The first phase focused primarily on “the subjection of the souls and bodies”\textsuperscript{107}, while the later phase showed a growing secular tendency, as the emphasis shifted to the reformation of manners. This shift necessitated new methods of social control, which were no longer based on fear and coercion but on the transformative character of the literate culture. It began with the concurrent centralizing forces of the absolutist monarchies and state-religions, both of which sought to set moral standards by regulating human conduct. Here, the state policy of bringing the recalcitrant multitude under its hegemonic rule went hand-in-hand with the overall objective of the church to Christianize the impious by eradicating the neo-pagan behaviours among their flock. Much like the religious advocates, in their resolve to forge obedience, the civil and royal powers focused their attention on domesticating the animal passions within the individual, most distinctly manifested in sexuality. In this way, the battle against the unruly was at the same time a battle against the godless – and, vice-versa.

The organized interdiction of popular customs often entailed eliminating pre-print forms of communication such as popular festivals, irregular assemblies,

\textsuperscript{107}. Muchembled, \textit{Popular Culture and Elite Culture} \ldots, 164.
spontaneous demonstrations, anonymous pasquinades, popular ballads and, especially, rumour.\textsuperscript{108} It did not take long to see the realization of such reform measures, since the remedy was already on the horizon in the form of the printed word. Intolerant attitudes towards – and actions against - popular festivities and carnivals evinced a strong class prejudice.\textsuperscript{109} The elite aversion to popular culture was further intensified when the subordinate classes turned their ceremonial rites into acts of political protest.\textsuperscript{110} The ritual of carnival seized “on the prepolitical elements of class struggle and contestation, concentrating on the unsettling and disorderly aspects of the periodic inversion.”\textsuperscript{111} Carnival was frequently a time when the violent expression of antipathy towards the ruling elite grew in intensity. Some raised demands for liberty of conscience, as reflected in the slogan: “We have been servants, but we will be masters now.”\textsuperscript{112}

The subversive aspect of mass politics did not escape the attention of the ruling authorities. In fact, it accentuated the elite pursuit of their civilizing mission in order to assimilate plebeians by redefining popular conduct and basing it on faith and obedience. Erasmus had been an early exponent of this cultural and political alliance between the ecclesiastical and secular elite. His impact was “to supplant in daily life the rituals of Christianity by the rituals of civility; to the sixteenth century his Christian humanism or humanist Christianity meant above all the erection of classically inspired eloquence as a model for communication between God and man and between men and each other.”\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{109} Burke, \textit{Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe}, 209.
\textsuperscript{110} An important example of this carnival of misrule was the popular unrest in Westonbirt during 1716-17 over unjust practices carried out by local authorities. It is discussed at length in David Rollison, “Property, Ideology and Popular Culture in a Gloucestershire Village”, \textit{Past and Present} 93, no. 1 (November 1981): 70 – 97. Another example was the bawdy house riots that broke out in Easter week of 1668 in Poplar, London. For a detailed account of the story see David Rollison, “Property, Ideology and Popular Culture in a Gloucestershire Village”, \textit{Past and Present} 93, no. 1 (November 1981): 70 – 97. See also Tim Harris, Harris, \textit{London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis}, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 82. See also his article, “The Bawdy House Riots of 1668”, \textit{The Historical Journal} 29, no. 3 (September 1986): 537 – 56.
\textsuperscript{112} Harris, “The Bawdy House Riots …”, 540.
It took generations for the reformation of manners to leave its mark; but the prospect of its success spurred the determination of the ruling elite to accelerate the process. The final triumph of the elite over popular culture did not happen solely because of religious and political repression. The laws and sanctions against popular customs and traditions had their limitations. A case in point was in mid-eighteenth century England where in spite of attempts at transforming “popular values” into “polite” ones, “the subculture materials in important ways refused to be transformed…” Even when legal restrictions were imposed, as for example on disorderly charivaresque cases in France, the tradition as a whole escaped repression.

Recent scholarship on plebeian culture has provided numerous case-studies of popular resistance to cultural pressures from the top. The historical impact of the civilizing process on oral popular culture - when secular elites, quite distinct from their religious peers, vigorously waged a war of words against the subordinate classes - effectively undermined the plebeian culture, as it side-lined oral traditions, the very medium on which traditional/conjectural knowledge rested. Consequently, the attack on popular culture shifted grounds from purely religious and moral considerations to a conflation of political and aesthetical concerns. It seemed as though Erasmus’ mission of reformation of manners was now undergoing a complete secular transformation. To this effect, the diffusion of print culture and literacy played a crucial role. It created an environment within which a broad range of bourgeois values from top-down permeated the collective consciousness.

By the eighteenth century, the use of literate media had become a pervasive means of combating the eccentric forms of popular activities and religious devotion. The objective was to debase oral folk literature by describing it in a manner that was

consistent with the total rejection of popular idioms and anecdotes. The most effective way of doing so was to vilify popular heroes, real or fictional, by simply portraying them as criminals. This was nothing but a prolonged cultural war on the part of the new elite, with a view to bringing the ‘riff-raff’ and the ‘ignorant’ to succumb to its cultural and ideological superiority. To this end, it was necessary not only to dismiss oral popular culture as irrelevant but also to demonize it. Robert Crowley (1518-1588), the English printer and Protestant reformer, in a 1537 correspondence with Thomas Cromwell evinced his displeasure against “harpers” and “rhymers” for praising “robberies” as “valiantness”. Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682), the English medical practitioner, though sympathetic to the unprivileged multitude, clearly distanced himself from oral sources. Describing the sources as essentially “vulgar errors”, Browne went so far as to characterize the common folk as “the most deceptible part of mankind.” A similar but more articulated criticism of oral sources was advanced by Thomas Hearne (1678-1735), the English antiquarian, who in contesting the reliability of using oral sources for the purpose of writing church history, argued that “the vulgar are generally uncapable of [the] judging of antiquities…” He refuted many old stories such as those attributed to the origin of some churches: “There is not the least probability in some of these stories; and yet the most incredible of them are often times listened. Philip Dormer Stanhope, the fourth earl of Chesterfield (1694–1773) cautioned his son not to use ‘common proverbs’, which in his opinion were ‘proofs of having kept bad and low company’”.117 Likewise, Sir William Wentworth (1748-1833) expressed his abhorrence at popular axioms when he urged his son, the future earl of Strafford, to be wary of the tales of the servants, even “auncyent honest servants… [because] such men do mistakes and misreport matters for wantt of lerning and sounder Judgement, though they be honest and meane truth.”118

The above remarks captured the literate/scientific mentality of the era that came to dominate Western consciousness. Bernard Palissy (1510-1589) personified the challenge to the veracity of ancient theories associated with Latin, by measuring them

117. Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, 213, 278.
up to the experimental realm of knowledge, of which those “destitute of Latin” like himself were the advocates. The emphasis on written records corresponded to the view that “literacy is primarily a technology of which records are the end-product”, and that “those who use documents less are less civilized.” Thus, a sixteenth century peasant in Troifach when reproached by the parish priest for musing over Lutheran message, rejoined: “But I read it in a book! It says so right there! Would a man go to the trouble of printing a book if it wasn’t good?” This identification of technological innovation with authenticity became a distinctive feature of modern scientific culture.

The growth of scientific ideas, aided by the printing press, changed the equilibrium between the elite and popular culture in ways that proved disadvantageous to the latter. The conviction that “literacy as a technological achievement constituted ‘a measure of progress’, inexorably “sanctioned the belief that those who relied on orality were by extension on the fringes of barbarity.” The preferential treatment of empirical over conjectural knowledge as a distinctive feature of scientific/rationalist thinking emerged in tandem with the inexorable marginalization of the inarticulate majority. Francis Bacon was representative of the new culture. He hailed modern science as an essentially elitist enterprise, while at the same time associating the adjective ‘popular’ with ‘ignorance’ and ‘vulgarity’. His acolyte, Charles Gildon (1665-1724), author of The History of the Athenian Society (1693) went even further when he declared: “Tho’ the Treasure of knowledge increas’d so vastly, yet the Possessors of this Treasure did not grow much more numerous than of old; so that the Benefit of it reach’d only to (a few),….most of the rest of Mankind were an ignorant Generation.” Conceivably, the Baconian science-centric mind-set became emblematic of a self-conscious intellectual

121. Melton, “From Image to word…”, 96.
122. M.T. Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record…, 20.
123. Manzo, “Francis Bacon…”, 251.
style that deepened the gulf between the patrician and the plebeian worlds. The gulf was widened as the language of civility and scientific thinking became intertwined. After all, the growing scientific rationalism fostered the intellectual bias that popular minds lacked any critical sense.

Equally remarkable was the association between freedom and politeness that set apart men of culture from the common folks. If the absence of scientific thinking among oral communities assigned them a lower status, the language of civility on its part reaffirmed their political deficiency. The point was well expressed by Henry Neville (1620-1694), author of *Plato Redivivus* (1681), who believed that ‘Debauchery of manners’ would result in ‘loss of liberty’, a conclusion that clearly viewed manners as the ‘foundations of civic politics’. Likewise, in *Discourses*, Algernon Sidney (1622-1683), the English politician, uttered: “Liberty cannot be preserved, if the manners of the people are corrupted.” However, the perceived image of the printed page as necessarily authoritative, and of the spoken word as at best erratic and untrustworthy may not solely be attributed to a single technological event. Beyond technological determinism, there existed an ideological dichotomy resulting from “relations of power” and “social-cum-aesthetic judgements”, whereby “the selective criticism of one group’s cultural forms serves to define, normalize, buttress or even create the tastes of another group.”

This dichotomy was part of the grand narrative of modernity that paved the way for the literate elite to present themselves as the harbingers of civility, rationality, scientific truth and social progress. While the elite enjoyed new privileges, they evinced great reluctance to extend them to the common folks. Perhaps the most significant area of concern was the extension of literacy to the unlettered because conservative clerics were afraid that the unlettered might read heretical books without supervision and come

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to radical conclusions. Likewise, the secular elite feared that the diffusion of literacy would result in the public involvement in political affairs.

The shift in policy to allow limited literacy to the inarticulate multitude gained momentum as the ruling elite showed a concerted effort to make the ungodly and recalcitrant multitude submit to the dominant social norms and values. The trend was set in motion in the mid-seventeenth century with the initiative of the Enlightenment thinkers and was accomplished through the intervention of the print media: both its authoritative and transformative characters shaped the popular mentality in accordance with the prevailing cultural ethos. The latter in particular proved to be an effective means of regulating popular conduct. For this reason, the ruling elite opted for limited public literacy, just enough to serve their ideological mantle: “literacy of sophistication that would allow one to read the Spectator or the Encyclopédie with some ease seems to have been denied those who depended on labor.”

Nevertheless, the transformative character of print played a crucial role in the cultural hegemony of the literate elite over the inarticulate majority even as the latter began to rely on print technology to disseminate their own viewpoints. The use of the print medium, aided by broadened literacy, led to a situation where oral exchange lost much of its original characteristics: its spontaneity and theatrical expression. It also imposed a considerable restraint on the passionate and at times violent manner in which verbal expressions were uttered. Such limitations of speech act marked a departure from oral popular culture that was increasingly viewed as vulgar and coarse. At the same time, the appreciation of print culture by the inarticulate majority forged a bond between elite and popular minds, thereby inducing them to adopt the standard bourgeois codes of conduct.

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127. Melton, “From Image to word…”, 95-96.
From this perspective, the printed medium interlaced with the civilizing process, as it sought to reform and refine manners by scripting behaviour. What the state apparatus had failed to enforce was now being accomplished indirectly through the medium of the printed word.\textsuperscript{131} Thus, there appeared a change in the public perception of oral popular culture from being an act of performance to that of representation.\textsuperscript{132} Beneath this lay a growing antipathy towards a particular mental state now being labeled as ‘enthusiasm’.\textsuperscript{133} This was manifested in a considerable decline in popularity of the tavern - the symbolic heart of popular entertainment, which in the eyes of the elite was seen as a locus of ‘anti-social’ behaviour. The tavern’s decline was accompanied by the emergence of coffee houses in many parts of seventeenth-century Europe. Their fast-growing number resulted in the creation of the Habermasian public sphere within which exchange of information and debates on day-to-day political affairs brought together a broad spectrum of people, ranging from the affluent classes to the very poor. This mixture of social classes in the relaxed ambience of the coffee house did not necessarily bring about a change in the elite perception of the masses; they were still viewed as socially inferior. Yet plebeians’ involvement in the prevailing political discourse led them to share aspects of the elite culture. As one contemporary commentator put it: “A coffee-house is free to all comers, so they have human shape, boldly therefore let any person who comes to drink coffee set down in the very chair, for here a seat is to be given to no man. That great privilege of equality is only peculiar to the Golden Age, and to a coffee house.”\textsuperscript{134}

Here, too, one witnesses the civilizing effect of the epochal changes on manners in a rather unmediated way. The prevailing mentality that associated coffee with effeminate manners - or worse, with sexual impotence - was certainly indicative of the dissemination of the culture of word that was intended to slim down the intensity of

\textsuperscript{131} Karl H. Wegert, “Contention with Civility: The State and Social Control in the German Southwest, 1760-1850”, \textit{The Historical Journal} 34, no.2 (June 1991): 355.
\textsuperscript{133} Payne, “Elite Versus Popular Mentality…”, 195.
\textsuperscript{134} Pincus, “Coffee Politicians Does Create….”, 814-15.
human passions. The remarks by a ‘wandering whore’ concerning the detrimental effect of coffee on men’s sexual drive clearly spoke to the point: “The coffee-houses have dried up all our customers like sponges...; lust and lechery were never in less repute since that liquor came up.” Such concerns were also shared by some women of distinction like the author of *The women of Petition*, who moaned that “the excessive use of that newfangled, abominable, heathenish liquor called coffee has so eunuched our husband, and crippled our more gallants, that they are become as impotent as age, and as unfruitful as those deserts whence that unhappy berry is said to be brought.”

There was thus a growing perception that linked the literate/elite culture with reduced passions. This had its impact on almost every facet of life such as a reduction in men’s libido, as the culture of word superseded that of sword. If however male sexual passion was to be restrained as a consequence of the historical mutation of the time, so was female sexuality. The urgency for this became ever greater, because the repression of female sexuality was the only possible means through which social control on the entire society could be exercised. This served the purpose of coping with an embarrassingly reduced male sexual drive against uninhibited female sexual passion, at the time when men set aside their swords and masculine culture increasingly became associated with violence. It was, therefore, no coincidence that starting in early modern era female sexuality was increasingly viewed in terms of bestiality and demonological imagination in Western consciousness. With the onset of the Enlightenment women’s sexual nature was redefined in a manner consistent with a new biology that sharply differentiated the sexes. This institutionalized a repressive view of women’s sexuality as part of a “newly ‘discovered’ contingency of delight that opened up the possibility of female passivity and ‘passionlessness’.”

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The Suppression of Oral Culture and the Social Exclusion of Women

If the repression of female sexuality constituted part of a general scheme for the implementation of discipline, the modern literary campaign aimed to wrest from women their role in the dissemination of oral culture. The refashioning of society in accordance with predominantly bourgeois socio-cultural norms and values entailed as much an attempt at reconstructing the past as a move towards laying the foundation for the future. While efforts at reconstruction focused solely on ridding the past of its ‘irrational’ elements, those pertaining to the future centred on the creation of an alternative mode of socialization that served the interest of discipline.

The scientific and literary discourses of modernity to which I referred in the preceding sections set the context for a new mode of socialization, one which increasingly relied on literary genres as a powerful means of moulding the young minds. The objective is well stated in the Grimms’ tale of “The Master-Thief” where it is argued that human persons, like trees, “must be trained while they are young.”\textsuperscript{138} This shift in early education, so to speak, marked the ultimate triumph of the print over oral culture. After all, one of the many functions of literacy was “to turn the child of … illiterate into literate”, a function that corresponded to the very character of modern education, i.e., “the will to teach, convert, colonize, or assimilate adults.”\textsuperscript{139} This was a trend that witnessed a considerable decline in the socializing role of women and ultimately set the context for the rise of modern schooling in the nineteenth century.

It was no wonder that in the war of words against the ‘barbarian others’ the prime targets were women. The great witch-hunt of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a case in point where female witches of predominantly poor background became the subject of intense repression. This was in stark contrast to the treatment of male witches of higher social status who by virtue of having “different relationships to the legal, cultural, social and economic institutions”, were able to counter witchcraft

\textsuperscript{138} Jacob and Wilhelm Grimms, \textit{Grimm’s Household Tales with the Author’s Notes}, trans., ed., Margaret Hunt, vol. 2 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884), 325.

\textsuperscript{139} Margaret Mead, “Our Educational Emphasis in Primitive Perspective”, \textit{The American Journal of Sociology} 48, no.6 (May 1943): 633, 637.
accusations. At issue was the general perception of male witchcraft as “bookish forms of diabolical knowledge” and men of such aptitude as “public practitioners of occult science”, a description which was seldom applied to their female counterparts.

Hence the notorious French Priest Lewis Gaufredy was only referred to as being a ‘perfidious wretch’ due to “a combination of bad reading material and sinful character.” The same association between male witchcraft and written texts was revealed in the account of the witch-finder John Stearne who noted that male witches were “addicted to the reading and study of dangerous books.” He further reasoned that “curiosity of knowledge, if reason and Arte fail, will … move men to seeke help of a Spirit…to draw them into the pit of Magick, Sorcery and Witchcraft.”140 Such examples point to a gendered social distinction whereby men were viewed as representing the learned culture, and women as the conveyors of ‘vulgar errors’. Evidently, the close identification of women with oral culture was to render them the object of contempt and derision. As Robert Muchembled observes:

One of the chief consequences of this sort of disparagement, echoed by the priests, by the authorities, by judges, and by schoolmasters, was to cut off urban popular culture from its roots. The fundamental role of the women, who collected and transmitted this culture, declined. To be more precise, this culture itself was contaminated by the degradation of women’s status. Could their old wives’ tales really be taken seriously by sons, husbands, and fathers. And even if they could, could one admit to this publicly without being exposed to derision, practical jokes, or punitive violence? It was in this sense that an accelerated discrediting of women was one of the principal means used in early modern times – it makes little difference whether consciously or not – to weaken urban popular culture.141

Consequently, there emerged a stream of invective against women. John Aubrey (1626-1697), the English antiquarian and miscellaneous writer, was quite vocal

141. Muchembled, Popular Culture and Elite Culture in France, 166.
in denouncing both women and the culture they represented. “Old customs and old-wives tales”, he avowed, “are gross things.”

Likewise, Nicholas Udall, the schoolmaster of Eton, showed contempt for the “olde wiues foolushe tales of Robyn Hoode and suche others, which many preachers haue in tymes past customably vsed to bring in, yaken out euen of the veraye botome and grossest parte of the dreggues of the common peoples foolyshe talkyng.” Others like the English Jesuit priest John Gerard (1564-1637) went so far as to stipulate: “All which dreames and old wives tales you shall from henceforth cast out of your books and memory.” This was also the view expressed by Francis Bacon whose discourse against women was of a more systematic nature. In his resolve to separate ‘superstitious stories’ from empirical data, Bacon was convinced that he “would not have the infancy of philosophy, to which natural history is a nursing mother, accustomed to ‘old wives’ fables.”

This was the beginning of an era in which women as conveyors of aural knowledge and transmitters of social mores disappeared from the public view. After all, their role in the socialization process, to use the expression of Elizabeth Horodowich, had rendered them “a degree of power…perhaps no less than their male republican counterparts.” However, with the renewal of the age-old patriarchal system in a modern form, men rather than women took charge of socializing the young, an event that forced women to recede into the background. This was accompanied with a sexual division of labour, seen in the widening gap between “the male sex, an elite of which monopolized written culture, and the female sex, restricted to primers and to oral culture…” The trend resonated with the opinion of male authors like Guez de Balzac. In his mockery of women who embarked on writing books, he went so far as to call them “mental transvestites.” The same bias against women’s involvement in literary enterprise was shown by other prominent authors like Michel de Pure and Madeleine de

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143. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture…*, 175-77.
Scudéry who reasoned that writing was essentially a male endeavour. As Erica Harth points out, there was “little space for women to speak, much less to fill the ranks of a mission civilisatrice in language.”

Such hostile remarks did not necessarily mean that women ceased to be active in the fields of art and literary enterprise. The formation of the Bluestockings Circle in England in the early 1750s initiated by women of middle-class background (including men like Benjamin Stillingfleet) clearly shows their determination to assert themselves in the republic of letters and seek “a life of the mind”. Yet, as a circle of highly intellectual and educated women with a potential subversive tendency toward the existing social hierarchy, the bluestockings increasingly became the target of attack by the conservative order. As Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz point out:

While the figure of the respectable female poet or writer of sentimental fiction and didactic literature had become a cultural commonplace, there was a new backlash against women asserting their views in the more ‘masculine’ genres of history and politics - especially when these views were oppositional or seditious.

Beneath such antagonistic attitudes towards women was of course the fear that their interference in social and political matters may upset the hierarchical order. A case in point was the participation of women in the events of Fronde years (1648-1653) that plunged most of France into civil war. This prompted the traditional authorities to interpret the entire disturbance as an act of subversion on the part of women, an inference that revealed their apprehension about the danger associated with women’s role in the public domain. Such perception of women, though inflated, had an element of truth, as Joan DeJean notes,

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147. Harth, *Cartesian Women... “*, 45, 47.
the command of rebel troops and the defense of Frondeur outposts was largely in the hands of aristocratic women, most notably Condé’s sister the Duchesse de Longueville…. More than any other conflict in French history, the Fronde can be seen as a women’s war. For once women had taken command, the resistance to absolutism remained, even after the princes’ liberation, a domain in which female rule was prominently displayed.150

Women’s cultural presence in the Parisian monde was equally subversive to the conservative order, not least because it opened the path to “the upward mobility of the bourgeoisie”, by integrating “the new men”.151 Hence, in the aftermath of the Fronde, the old nobility mingled domesticity with the defence of the status quo, arguing that “the monde was evil because the women who led it were using the tools of leisure, venality, and illicit love to upset the social hierarchy.”152

If women of higher ranks were to be muzzled because of their perceived seditious acts, those of humble origin were to be eliminated from the social scene altogether. The task was entrusted to male pedagogues, ‘new men’ of bourgeois order who sought to obviate women’s traditional role in moulding the youth through popular stories and lore. This was consistent with the emergence of the new mode of socialization in which the task of edifying young minds was taken away from nursing maids and servants and entrusted to male pedagogues of formal ranks.153

153. For example, William Kempe (1560-1603), the school master of the Elizabethan era urged people to keep their children away from “barbarous nurses, clownish playing mates, and all rustickall persons.” Ralph Josselin (1616-1683), vicar of Earls Colne in Essex, also expressed his gratitude to the Lord for saving him from the “poisonous infections from servants.” Likewise, Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), English novelist and author of Robinson Crusoe, described popular lore and stories like Chevy Chace, Vortigern, and Roger of Mortimer as being “among the rubbish of the old women and the Romish Priests.” See Fox, Oral and Literate Culture ..., 191-94.
Fairy Tales as a Medium of Socialization

If the task of socializing the young was increasingly assigned to male pedagogues, the medium through which such a task had to be accomplished was the literary genre of fairy tale. Present in the genre was the effect of the epochal changes which markedly distinguished it from oral folk tales and medieval romances. The distinction is, for the most part, seen in the dynamics of the fairy tale that clearly responded to the shifting historical environment. Hence, the variations in the narrative structure of the tales did not merely represent a stylistic change, but “a substantial transformation of the manner in which society was to be depicted.” The changes found expression in a new concept of humanity now centred around an adult/child detached from the natural world, fearful of his/her inner bestiality, and conditioned by the religiously inspired bourgeois cultural ethos and morality. Class, gender, age and racial differentiations were yet other manifestations of the new concept which helped create new entries in the hierarchically defined modern patriarchal system. In this respect, primitive accumulation in capitalist society, as Federici points out:

was not simply an accumulation of exploitable workers and capital. It was also an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class, whereby hierarchies built upon gender, as well as “race” and age, became constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat.

The above considerations lead us to one of the defining features of the fairy tale, namely its prospect of upward social mobility in an increasingly secular environment. This particular feature of the genre is totally absent from the literature of the medieval period, as the opportunities for moving up the social ladder were extremely limited. A glance at the *Lais of Marie de France*, the twelfth century literary figure, corroborates the point. Throughout her poetic narratives and fables, there is no indication

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155. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*..., 64.
whatsoever of the possibility of any upward social mobility even at the level of imagination. Rather, the tendency is to preserve and perpetuate the status quo, by constantly urging the subordinate classes to stay where they belong in the social hierarchy. Perhaps the only extenuation sought for the common folks in a hopelessly static world was the prevalence of an eschatological worldview that serve to promise better conditions in the afterlife.

This immutability of the hierarchical order can be inferred from Marie’s allegorical tale of ‘a foolishly upward-aspiring ass’, which she used as a metaphor for a discontented peasant who prayed to have one more horse beside the one he had, only to learn that he lost the one he already had. The message is clear: “Nobody ought to pray, therefore / To have more than his needs call for.” This also suggests that social differentiation was a pre-destined reality based entirely on one’s birth into a specific social class. The following excerpt from the story makes it plain:

Those who to raise themselves aspire
And who a higher place desire –
One that’s not fitting to their girth
And most of all, not to their birth.
The same result will come to pass
For many, like the beaten ass.  

In conveying the moral of the story, Marie declares in no uncertain terms that;

This example serves to say
The ignorant are oft this way
Believing that which cannot be,
They’re swayed and changed by vanity.  

It is for this reason that in Marie’s worldview, people of humble origin are considered to be subservient to their social superiors. As Joyce E. Salisbury notes, Marie’s bestiary literature “made the moral specific to a feudal society in which loyalty to one’s lord was central”, and that “this metaphoric tool” served to perpetuate “a static social order, with an obedient lower class.” In the following passage from one of her narratives, Marie quite explicitly reminds the peasant of his subservient position:

He should give honour to his lord
And should be loyal, keep his word.
And when his master is in need,
He should join others and bring aid.

In like fashion, Marie’s appeal to the ruling class to be just and considerate of their subjects is part of the same strategy at maintaining the status quo. Even when she admonishes “nobility who abused their power, wealthy who were greedy”, it is only to remind them of the inequity of misusing power and wealth which to her is contrary to just rule. To this end, in one of her bestiary narratives, Marie uses the metaphor of a lion for a prince who, though destined to rule, is obliged to show compassion and empathy to his subjects. This is well-stated in the following passage:

A prince should be well-rested too;
In his delights not overdo;
Nor shame himself or his domain,
Nor cause the poor folk undue pain.

Thus, the world that Marie envisioned, observes Salisbury, was “a static, well-ordered, hierarchical society”, and that the function of her fables was “to criticize deviation from this order.”

159. Salisbury, The Beast Within..., 119, 121, 132.
161. Salisbury, The Beast Within..., 118.
Unlike the medieval Romances and fables, fairy tales had in sight a vision of society that was in tandem with the epochal changes and the cultural sensibilities of the rising bourgeoisie. From this perspective, fairy tales may be viewed as the indication of a rupture in human history that separated the medieval period from the thought patterns of modernity. The separation is also seen in the growing distance between humans and the animal kingdom. While the acceptance of one’s inner bestiality was a theme that is present in medieval bestiary literature, in most fairy tales it was a theme that had to be cast off. In short, the difference was one of bestiality versus civility. In this respect, the bestial characterization of the behaviour of subordinate classes, as already mentioned, proved to be a powerful discourse that served the elite’s project of imposing its culture over the entire society. Such a project was essentially in the service of social control through new modes of discipline which reinforced a specific notion of the social and moral order that best suited the interests of the ruling elite. This was done first and foremost by “accentuating the difference between human and bestial behaviour”, for it created “an important domain for talking about disapproved or undesirable attributes.”  

This is how the ecclesiastical authorities and the aristocracy described the ‘licentious’ and ‘recalcitrant’ behaviour of the poor and the underclass. The depiction of women and the underclass in such inferior terms was not totally a modern phenomenon; it also found expression in the bestiary literature of the late medieval society, even though the distinction between humans and animals still remained blurred.

Here again, Marie de France’s collection of animal fables bears witness to the cultural divide that existed between the elite and popular classes in the medieval era. Throughout her work she presents a sympathetic image of the rich and the powerful, while at the same time depicting the poor as irrational, violent, and sexually unrestrained, all of which were perceived to have been animal traits.  

The medieval quest for an overarching concept of humanity in stark contrast to bestiality never materialized. First, because violent and deviant acts were common to

all social classes; and, second, because there was no clear-cut distinction that set apart human from the bestial realm. The appearance of hybrid creatures like monsters in medieval imagination was symptomatic of this peculiarity of the age. It concurred with the medieval recognition of a specific category of subhuman wild folk, believed to have degenerated into an animal state. This inevitably called for some degrees of tolerance towards certain patterns of human behaviour deemed unseemly. Consequently, strict regulations of human conduct for the purpose of casting off its bestial characteristics were also rendered irrelevant.

The intellectual elites of the early modern period, in collaboration with religious figures and driven by the historical vigour of modernity, embarked on formulating a new concept of humanity. The formation of the absolutist state and its concomitant notion of civility, together with the culture of the word, accelerated the process that effectively transformed the European cultural landscape. The change corresponded to the end of a long-drawn-out battle between the ancients and moderns, a battle from which the latter emerged triumphant. Charles Perrault’s classic fairy tales are the embodiment of the new era. The tales’ pedagogical elements, which were construed in light of the new cultural sensibilities, signalled a major departure from the past. Fairy tales entailed the cultural hegemony of the dominant classes by diffusing the prevailing cultural ethos including, of course, the hope of social change i.e., progress that defined the spirit of the modern era.

The new mode of socialization created in the young minds a psychic self-control that served as a form of collective coercion. The combination of pedagogy and amusement, so characteristic of fairy tales, became an effective means of early education among the affluent classes. Charles Perrault’s portrayal of a polite, eloquent, obedient, and innocent child was geared towards the same goal. However, children of the poor and the underclass did not loom large in Perrault’s scheme of literary socialization. Their inclusion in the socializing process was a later phenomenon that occurred with the expansion of literacy and modern schooling. This entailed a policy shift on the part of the ruling elite to co-opt the bulk of the poor and the underclass into the modern nation-state in accordance with its own social norms and cultural sensibilities. As a result, the subsequent literary figures authoring fairy tales had to widen their pedagogical agenda
in order to instil in children of the underprivileged classes such bourgeois values as honesty, perseverance, obedience, and civility, which had hitherto been taught only to children of the elite families.

The process accelerated as the prospect of upward social mobility and the desire for inclusion in a modern nation-state drove the masses to internalize and imbibe aspects of the dominant culture. As Eugen Weber notes, by the nineteenth century “most parishes, even rural ones...had assimilated ...the values of the modern world: the virtue of work, of thrift, even of change perceived as progress.”165 The popular turn to the print culture, especially with the expansion of literacy in the nineteenth century was particularly important in creating the mechanism through which the cultural and ideological supremacy of the rising bourgeoisie was entrenched. This found expression in a universally shared language inspired by the redemptive potential of modernity that held the promise of material progress, equal rights, and civilized manners.166 But if the language of modernity had made the subordinate classes submit to the cultural hegemony of bourgeoisie, it, too, had the potential to overturn the established order. This shift of emphasis, characteristic of the later phase of modernity, is best embodied in the works of such authors as Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, and Mark Twain. This redemptive potential of modernity is the themes I shall address in chapter VI.

Part 2: Imagining Children
Introduction to Part II

The present section surveys an historical trajectory of the fairy tale from the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century as the genre changes focus and advances contested views of childhood. This was in tandem with the civilizing process which was uneven, moving in different directions and fomenting divergent viewpoints. While the process unleashed an entire movement aimed at the reformation of manners, it also gave expression to the language of rights. In both cases, the process greatly influenced the concept of childhood and the fairy tale as the latter echoed the conceptual vicissitude of childhood.

The Renaissance witnessed the rise of a new literary genre which was secular in orientation and appealing in its message to the socially aspiring middle-class. The fairy tales of Giovanni Straparola were perhaps most representative of the spirit of both the new genre and the era. They conveyed the message that wealth and status would henceforth derive from newer assets like knowledge and expertise rather than the older systems of privilege.

In the course of the civilizing process, culture became an essential aspect of upward social mobility with male and female authors vying with each other to determine its trajectory. Civility, refined manners, and virtue became ever more important attributes of nobility. They opened a new path to upward social mobility, well reflected in the fairy tales of Madam d’Aulnoy. Central to her stories was the emphasis on social reform, perceived primarily from the female perspective. Yet such a perspective did not radically alter the course of events, given the male domination of the civilizing process and the print culture. Nor did it give expression to the literary construction of childhood as d’Aulnoy’s tales were not intended for children. What she certainly achieved was a new concept of female power and nobility based on virtue and civility respectively.

Charles Perrault’s collection of fairy tales was a landmark in the history of the genre in that it tilted the civilizing process toward the male authors. Thus, while Perrault, in much the same way as d’Aulnoy, stressed the need for civility, virtue, and refined manners, he had an entirely different agenda. It was to serve, primarily the absolutist state so that knowledge and expertise could achieve their desired effects only if used in the service of the sovereign, the very symbol of the patriarchal society.
Perrault’s magic tales likewise promoted modern concepts of childhood discipline, consistent with patriarchy in early modernity. His psychogenetic exertions on young minds instilled in them a cultural ethos and moral values in order to produce obedient citizens. This early education, so to speak, initiated a system of surveillance to which children were subjected. Childhood of the fairy tale acted in real life as a metaphor for oppression that aimed at not only children but also women and a host of other “inadequate adults”.

In this respect, Perrault’s magic tales may be seen as reflecting the excesses of early modernity. He certainly tended to exclude a wide spectrum of people from the concept of nation. Among them were the underclass, the social outcast, and women, all of whom were perceived as a threat to a society led by a male elite. Oral popular culture was to be eradicated in order to secure that cultural and ideological hegemony. Perrault’s childhood of the fairy tale was part of a moral universe that restricted the behaviour of the elite themselves by repressing their sexuality.

This is precisely why Perrault’s target audience consisted of children of the elite and not those of the poor and the underclass. The inclusion of the multitude that had been dismissed as inarticulate, rowdy, and recalcitrant only came later in response to the growing labour market during urbanization and new forms of commercialization. This led to the modern school system that stressed mass education and the participation of the masses in nation-building.

The Grimms’s *Children’s and Household Tales* were collected and published in the context of the emergent, modern nation-state. They were a powerful medium of socialization with a universal appeal that went beyond class and boundaries. In this sense, the Grimms considerably expanded both the concept of nation and the social function of the fairy tale, and yet they were highly reluctant to engage in radical politics lest they upset the established hierarchical order. After all, the goal was to promote German national ideology by defining it in the light of the past cultural heritage and in concert with contemporary moral and cultural standards, a goal that succeeded in large measure with the spread of literacy and the institution of modern schooling.
Accordingly, the concept of childhood underwent a mutation becoming not only a symbol of purity for an imagined nation but also the microcosm of a real one aspiring to excel in its cultural and moral endeavours. This was characteristic of the age of Romanticism that portrayed the child image as being subjected to a repressive culture and yet the object of reverence. The sentimentalization of children, though mostly of symbolic significance, set the context for the emergence of an alternative view of the child that was radically at variance with its image projected by a predominantly adult/male elite. This was the historical moment when the liberating potential of modernity began to assert itself as manifestly expressed in the language of rights.

The works of such literary figures as Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, and Mark Twain emerged in this historical moment. Each presents a critique of modernity that centres around the modern concept of childhood as well as its alternative. Dickens’s *David Copperfield* considerably enlarges the concept of childhood by bringing to the equation the child of poverty. Dickens’s child of fiction is a labouring child with middle class aspirations, who shares the adult qualities of the medieval child but also the childlike characteristics of the modern child. Dickens’s child-hero struggles to break free of the repressive world of adults; he is entrusted with the task of redeeming women, the underclass, and the socially marginalized groups.

Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* marks a turning point in the literary history of childhood as it, too, breaks with the Romantic/Victorian image of the child. This is manifested in Alice’s ceaseless quest for equal rights. At the core of it lay a new adult-child economy which is as much cognizant of adult qualities in a child as it is of childlike characteristics in adults. Being a female, Carroll’s child of fiction redeems women and ultimately humanity at large.

George MacDonald’s *The Light Princess* aims at redeeming childhood by dissociating it from its feminized characterization, a particular facet of Victorian morality. The focus is entirely on the experience of a female child whose sense of oppression is specific to her sexual identity. To this end, the Light Princess appears as an anomaly that can only be combatted by breaking free of the emotional and sexual inhibitions imposed on women as part of their early socialization.
Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* provides yet another alternative to the Puritan/Victorian mode of socialization in late nineteenth-century American society. Here, the concept of adolescence and the element of class are brought together in the person of a poor adolescent who evokes the mixed images of childhood, both medieval and modern. The novel also functions as a form of fairy tale for particular age groups beyond the tale age, who re-experience the magical effect of their lost fairyland through an entirely different path.
Chapter IV: The Changing Character of Fairy Tales from Straparola to Perrault

In chapter II, on the review of the literature, I discussed the main approaches to childhood and concluded by endorsing Philippe Ariès’s central thesis that the Western concept of childhood was a social construct. Here, I reiterate the same view by looking at some of Charles Perrault’s fairy tales which serve as yet another way of establishing the validity of social constructionism versus socio-biological determinism. This entails an understanding of the literary genre of the fairy tale as well as its historical trajectory from Giovanni Francesco Straparola (1485? -1558) to Madam d’Aulnoy (1650/1651–1705) and to Charles Perrault (1628 –1703) as it increasingly became identified with children. The argument is concurrent with Elias’ civilizing process that unleashed an entire movement towards the reformation of manners and a new system of discipline in its wake. Both laid the ground for the modern concept of childhood not only as a biological entity but also as a discourse of domination.

What Is a Fairy Tale?

In common parlance, a fairy tale is described as a short didactic story that features human and non-human characters interacting in a liminal space filled with marvels, enchantment, and magic in an unspecified distant past (“Once upon a time”). It often concludes with a happy ending for the magically assisted heroes and heroines whose virtuous conduct, honesty, diligence, and perseverance help them overcome extraordinary difficult circumstances and inimical forces. As such, a fairy tale is about “initiation rites that introduces the listeners to the ‘proper’ way” to enter a particular class or move up the social hierarchy.1

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A few points need to be added to our description of the fairy tale as we begin to conceive it in a more technical sense. First, it is different from oral folk narratives in that it is clearly identified with a single author rather emanating from a particular community. A cursory look at the history of the fairy tale from the Renaissance to the present day corroborates the point, as we can, for example, refer to Giovani Staraparola’s, Madame d’Aulnoy’s, Charles Perrault’s, and the Grimms’ fairy tales. Each author embodies an epochal change which finds expression in his/her own life experience and fairy tales.

Second, the notion that the fairy tale was a reproduction of the oral folk tales, fables, legends, and chivalric romances in printed form is historically unsubstantiated. Fairy tales may share certain motifs, signs, and features with oral folk narratives, but this should not necessarily lead us to overlook differences in emphasis and orientation. It is worth noting that sixteenth and seventeenth century authors of fairy tales treated oral folk motifs as no more than metaphors for events and ideas which were modern in essence. A case in point was Giambattista Basile (1566-1632), who “incorporated many classical references into his tales…took Dianna and other characters from ancient literature and inserted them into his extravagant metaphors”. In doing so, he advanced an altogether different concept of morality that reflected the mentality of the Renaissance period. At issue is the transformative power of the printing press, itself an historical rupture in the human perception of the world. Hence, the point to consider in relation to the history of the fairy tale is to “view it as a product of that quintessential engine of modernity, the printing press.” This rupture entailed a new worldview radically distinct from that of the pre-modern era. This is consistent with Marshal McLuhan’s famous phrase: “The medium is the message” a benchmark accounting for a whole new set of cultural and moral priorities that were diffused through the intervention of print technology.

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3. For a discussion of this aspect of fairy tales see Suzanne Magnanini, “Between Straparola and Basile: Three Fairy Tales from Lorenzo Selva’s Della metamorfosi (1582)”, *Marvels & Tales* 25, no. 2 (October 2011): 331-69.
The point is further elaborated by Caroline Sumpter, who subscribes to “the notion that the press could shape oral tradition rather than merely recording it…” This is the context for the transforming character of the fairy tale which is well expressed in Dorothy R. Thelander’s dictum: “What is archaic in one age may become revolutionary in another.” The statement is emblematic of the historical mutation occurring within the realm of symbolic representation that assigns different meanings to a linguistic sign at different historical epochs. While the motifs used in fairy tales may have existed in medieval, ancient or even pre-historic times, they have an altogether different connotation. As Bottigheimer argues: “It is not just a motif (such as a single shoe or a single cat) that determines when a particular tale (in this case, a rise fairy tale) becomes historically recognizable but also who does what, what happens to whom, and how it all ends.”

This brings us to the third point, namely that the mere existence of oral folk narratives in print form does not turn them into fairy tales. The Indian book of *Pancatantra* (five tricks), and the Persian text of *One Thousand and One Nights* are two well-known written records from ancient times which have survived until today, and yet they are not fairy tales *per se*, despite the ample evidence that their motifs have been extensively appropriated for other literary and artistic purposes. The truth about the fairy tale as a literary genre is that it is capable of both transforming and being transformed, as they are written and re-written from one historical epoch to another. The oral folk/wonder tales from the two ancient sources typically reflect the mentality of a distant past, one in which the chances of moving up in the social hierarchy were almost non-existent and magical effects and miraculous events were the prerogatives of the elite classes.

It is from this perspective that I begin to explore the secular dimension of fairy tales, beginning with Straparola as a classical example. Here, the focus is primarily on

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the prospect of a better life through a whole chain of magic, marriage, and wealth that imparted a distinctly novel character to the tales. As Thelander again points out: “While the great classical themes may be little more than echoes, the tales still reflect a concern with love, marriage, and advancement in social terms that are foreign to folk fairy tale.”8 Such a concern denotes a change in the social function of marriage from being a strictly inner-class practice to one that served as a vehicle for upward social mobility. Yet, in the real-life situation of sixteenth-century Venice where the marriage between “a commoner” and “nobility” was legally forbidden9, “the introduction of magic was thus a critical element for fantasies of class-leaping wedding.”10 It is this “intersection of a specific impossibility in real life and its achievement in fantasy that marks the birth of the modern rise fairy tale.” This is evident in Sarsparilla’s plotline, which “eschewed religious miracle and turns instead to secular magic to bring a poor girl or boy together with a royal spouse.”11

Episodes of this kind in classical fairy tales represent an age when even the magical realm passed under the sway of secular impulses, thereby divesting magic of its religious and supernatural attributes. This shift of emphasis from religious to secular magic at the same time demanded a new form of narrative that became a common feature of the fairy tale, as in Straparola’s La Piacevoli Notti (The Pleasant Nights). The magic is of a different type, free of both religious determinism and of pagan superstition. This departure from the two rival worldviews secularized the role of magic and marriage, and presented them as the two principal rise factors in the fairy tale genre of its preceding tale types.

It would be useful to consider the evolving concept of secular magic as symbolically reflected in classical and modern fairy tales. Magic by its very definition is an art or technique of producing desired effects on natural and supernatural forces, often by performing rituals or uttering words. Whether or not one believes in magic, it is

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8. Thelander, “Mother Goose and Her Goslings…”, 470.
commonly regarded as a specialized realm of knowledge available only to a small group of people. The technical and performative aspects of magic that belong to its secretive and exclusive nature at the same time endow them with its distinct quality. The word magic proved to be so versatile that by the early modern period it was extended to other forms of practical knowledge. Paramount among them were knowledge of commerce and statecraft that helped elevate men of humble origin to higher status. In this way, modern science and technology, but no less the new cultural ethos bearing the stamp of civility, produced an equally magical effect. This added dimension of magic, as in Straparola’s *Pleasant Nights*, marked the shift of focus from the supernatural to the social.

Straparola’s classical fairy tales undoubtedly provided a secular framework within which subsequent writers from Basile to Madam d’Aulnoy and Charles Perrault to the Grimms compiled their fairy-tale compositions. Straparola’s tales of “Costantino and His Cat”, “Magic Doll”, “Prince Pig”, and “Peter the Fool” in particular, served as models for some of the most popular fairy tales in Western literary tradition. Thus, Mme d’Aulnoy’s “Le Prince Marxassin” was in many ways a variation of “Prince Pig”, and her “le Dauphin” a recreation of “Peter the Fool”. Likewise, Charles Perrault’s “Puss in Boots” seems to have been greatly inspired by “Costantino Fortunado”, while the Grimms’ “Hans mein Igel” and “The three Brothers” have for the most part been modelled after “Prince Pig” and “The Tailor’s Apprentice” respectively.12

Viewed from this perspective, we may say emphatically that the history of the fairy tale as a distinct literary genre did not originate from seventeenth century French salons, but it first featured in the works of Straparola and Basile. The emphasis is not so much a matter of periodization as it is about the novelty of the genre both in style and in narrative structure that resonated with the changing historical environment of the Renaissance period.13 This is manifested in the secular character of the fairy tale, which

13. Zipes mentions Giovanni Boccaccio’s *The Decameron* (1349-1350) and Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (1387) as two early examples that “helped prepared the way for the establishment of the fairy tale as an independent genre”, although he at the same time admits that they were not “pure fairy tales per se”, Zipes, “Introduction”, xxii.
clearly distinguishes it from both fables and folk tales, even when the latter appear in literary form. The argument is corroborated by the historical trajectory of the genre as the narrative structure of the tales shift from one mundane issue to another in accordance with the cultural and ideological imperatives of the era. This is the theme I intend to discuss in the present chapter and the next by focusing on the shift from socio-cultural issues pertaining to adults to childhood, a shift that simultaneously entails the growing identification of the fairy tale with children.

**Straparola and the Promise of a Better Life**

In the prelude to the story of Costantino Fortunato, Straparola makes the following remarks about his magic tales which is quite revealing.

> It is no rare event, beloved ladies, to see a rich man brought to extreme poverty, or to find one who from absolute penury has mounted to high estate. And this last-named fortune befell a poor wight of whom I have heard tell, who from being little better than a beggar attained the full dignity of a king. 14

Reading into *The Pleasant Nights*, Ruth B. Bottigheimer has identified two distinct thematic frameworks that best fit Straparola’s own description: restoration and rise tales. In the first type of stories, men or women of distinction, often of royal rank, fall from grace, endure hardship and misery, but eventually regain their lost privileges through magic and marriage to royalty. This happy end comes only in the wake of a series of trials and tribulations from which the protagonist must emerge triumphant, often with magic – that is what makes it a fairy tale. The tales of Livoretto, Biancabella and Guerrino stand out as telling examples of restoration tales.

On the other hand, in rise tales, or ‘rags-to-riches’ stories, the narrative structure takes a completely different turn. It is no longer about the volatile life

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experience of a prince or princess; it focuses instead on people of humble origin who are catapulted into wealth and prominence. The emphasis on the magical element in this type of stories is even greater, especially as it brings about inter-class marriage. For, if marriage was the sole means of ensuring upward social mobility in the stringent hierarchical order of the medieval and early modern era, then the inconceivable act of ‘class-leaping marriage’ itself would belong to the realm of magic. Thus, in ‘Prince Pig’, ‘Peter the Fool’, ‘Magic Doll’, ‘The Tailor’s Apprentice’ and ‘Costantino Fortunato’ which best represent Straparola’s rise tales, magic is the decisive factor that invariably makes possible “a fantasy future of marriage and wealth.” Such promise of a better life resonated with the social aspirations of a reading public for whom Straparola “provided newly conceptualized literary provender”. As Bottigheimer points out, “If a repellently filthy and stupid boy [Pietro Pazzo] could marry a princess with the help of a little magic, readers might feel encouraged to imagine or dream of an even more glorious future for themselves.” It was for this reason that fairy tale collections, like any other merchandise, “were saleable only if they offered stories that contemporaries wanted to read, stories that fit their life and experience…”

At the time that Straparola penned *the Pleasant Nights*, something magical, though somewhat erratic, was underway. It was the wonder of a new era in which the expansion of urban centres, the growth of monetary economy and specialization entailed the spectre of uncertainty for some and the prospect of success for others. Banking and commerce in the Renaissance cities of Florence and Venice, fostering in turn new forms of social distinction, had set the trend. Not only did it present opportunities hitherto unknown, but also it rendered irrelevant the old social prerogatives, as financial gain, knowledge and expertise, rather than mere privilege or birth, became the measures of status. Such a reorientation of values also occurred in France where the shifts of class

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and power relations brought about new opportunities for an urban middle class and the relative decline of old nobility.

The steady rise of a host of bankers, traders, entrepreneurs, and publishers in the port city of Venice during Straparola’s lifetime is testimony to this. His rise tales in particular were cast in an urban setting, where the possibility of upward social mobility was greater. This corresponds to the view that the narrative elements of the tales “issue from real-life experiences and customs to form a paradigm that facilitates recall for tellers and listeners.”17 The biography of Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici (c.1360-1429) reads almost like a spectacular rise fairy tale. He established the most powerful financial dynasty in Florence that in due course became the de facto ruler of the Florentine republic for over two centuries. Although there was no magic in Medici’s life history, money and royal marriage acted as the two magical elements that allowed his family to claim royal status. The story of the Medici family is clearly reflective of the tradition of Renaissance magic tales wherein “magic becomes a narrative motor that can bring about a heaven on earth happy ending for its heroes and heroines, a narrative closure that marks the fairy tale genre.” This is so because of the shift in “the physical composition of magic, the earthy or other-worldly locus of supernaturals, and the allocation of agency among supernaturals and human beings”, which ultimately transforms “ancient and medieval magic from its (principal) service to divinities to the service of human beings.”18

As for the nobility, it had to adapt to economic fluctuations and political instability, often by abandoning the sword in favour of civility, and seeking alternative means of survival. This was in part the experience of some members of the medieval aristocracy who, facing the prospect of loss of privilege, relocated and adapted to new ways. Straparola’s restoration tales reflect that pattern, as in the story of Biancabella who, after a period of hardship happily reunited with her husband, Ferrandino, king of Naples. What the story conveys is reflective of a real-life situation both during Straparola’s lifetime and after. An instance of this would be the influx of some of the Italian feudal

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aristocracy into the Kingdom of Naples, there to lead a modest existence at first but re-emerging once again as members of an urban elite. The report by Christopher Black confirms the trend:

Many Tuscan elite families who had based their commerce and banking, and especially the wool industry, shifted to become dominant landowners and fief holders, not only in Tuscany but also in the kingdom of Naples and the Papal States; notably the Albizzi, Capponi, Guicciardini, Ricasoli, Riccardi, Ridolfi, and Salviati. However, some noble houses, such as Riccardi, were ready to head commercial companies through the seventeenth and eighteenth century.19

With the expansion of commercial centres and the ascendancy of the North-western maritime powers, the nobility re-cast itself ever more as part of the new elite. Alert members of the aristocracy increasingly saw that the shifting environment could threaten their power and prestige as much as it could preserve or even enhance them. It is therefore not surprising that some of the restoration tales like “Cinderella”, as Bottigheimer notes, were refashioned by subsequent fairy tale writers to “make them fit the rise fairy tale model.”

Both the rise and restoration variants of Straparola’s tales registered these mobile circumstances in which “literate city people, and city possibilities intersected and became a reality in urban people’s life.”20 This is the context of the new literary genre of fairy tales whose narrative structure, moral, and worldview set them apart from oral folk tales. The difference lay primarily in the secular character of the new genre, as the tales increasingly came to focus on the importance of this life rather than the next. Franz Ricklin’s psychoanalytical interpretation of the Japanese tale of “The Little Tear Jug” and its German variation, “The Shroud” by the Brothers Grimm, may serve as an example here as it captures the very secular essence of the fairy tale. Both versions of the story tell of the apparition of a dead son, urging his mother to cease weeping, because

her tears disturb his soul. In the first version, he carries a jug too full of tears to accommodate any more from her. In the second version, he exhibits his wet shroud, which makes it too uncomfortable for him to rest in his grave. Ricklin pinpoints the mundane aspect of the moral of the story, which is its therapeutic self-consolation, thereby concluding: “It is not a therapy for the dead but for the living.”

The secular message that Ricklin discerns in the above story is a common feature of almost all fairy tales. They all deal with worldly issues in some fashion, except that the message shifts its focus from one historical epoch to another. The trajectory of fairy tales from Straparola to Madam D’Aulnoy, Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm reveals the continuity of the secular message embedded in the genre. There was however a major difference between Straparola’s stories and those of his successors. The difference lay fundamentally in their varied social outlook that prioritizes their respective secular message. Whereas in Straparola’s rise tales the message centres on the prospect of material success, with aspiring adults as the primary audience, in the fairy stories of subsequent writers, notably Mme d’Aulnoy, the message assumed a cultural dimension. As we shall see, the latter turns the whole notion of upward social mobility into a cultural enterprise by identifying nobility with civility, virtue, and refinement. D’Aulnoy’s insistence on social reform with a view to enhancing women’s status was yet another aspect of her secular message which she so earnestly championed. Below is an examination of d’Aulnoy’s collection of fairy tales from a civilizational perspective, followed by a discussion of Charles Perrault’s magic tales which are closely related to the modern concept of childhood.

**D’Aulnoy’s Fairy Tales and the Quest for Secular Morality**

D’Aulnoy’s fairy tales reflect the new era of civility that aimed to set off bourgeois cultural sensibilities against the moral imperatives of the absolute state. This shift of emphasis is expressed in what Robin Simpson calls “a clash between a manifestation of

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authoritarianism and an opposing current of individualism.” D’Aulnoy’s close association with bourgeois circles increasingly led her to denounce Louis XIV’s policy of centralization, which severely restricted individual liberties. She advanced a whole new concept of “women’s freedom” with its rights “to pursue love outside marriage” and the right “to lead society through the civilizing influences of their refinement.” In doing so, she proposed “a redefinition of the elite” based not so much on hereditary rights as on personal merits, thus rejecting the manifest symbols of the traditional hierarchical order.  

From this perspective, d’Aulnoy’s collection of tales may be seen as representing the shift from prerogative to class as the mark of social differentiation and distinction. Not surprisingly, d’Aulnoy’s target audience consisted mainly of the more enlightened members of the French aristocracy, who in their quest for a distinct identity gave the category of class its social signification. But while the old prerogatives lost much of their relevance, gender differentiation persisted and functioned as a symbolic representation of submission to authority in a modern patriarchy. As Natalie Davis points out: “the increasing legal subjugation of wives to their husbands” served as “a guarantee for the obedience of both men and women to the slowly centralizing state.”

As a woman of distinction, d’Aulnoy no doubt embraced the notion of hierarchy as she constantly warned against acts of insubordination to authority figures. Even when the latter blatantly abused their power, she still urged the underdog to show good behaviour until the intervention of a higher moral authority that alone could fix the wrong. Yet, by the same token, she defies the predominantly male character of this hierarchical order that denies women their own social space. This dual position leads her to assume the role of a benevolent fairy godmother to an audience which was as fascinated by the world of enchantment as it wanted change in real life. Such a role was confirmed by her contemporary, Henriette-Julie de Murat (1670-1716), who had

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24. Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France..., 127.
dedicated her tales to “Les Fées Modernes” (modern fairies). In the preface to her *Histoires Sublimes et allegoriques*, while pejoratively characterizing the traditional women story-tellers as “old fairies” Murat went on to praise women writers of fairy tales in the following words:

> But you, my ladies, you have chosen another way; you occupy yourselves only with great things, the least of which are to give wit to the men and women who have none, beauty to the ugly, eloquence to the ignorant, riches to the poor, and luster to the most hidden things. You are all beautiful, young, well formed, nobly and richly dressed and housed, and you live only in the courts of kings, or in enchanted palaces.25

This image of women’s writers as modern fairies necessitated that their magic tale be promoted to the level of important works of literature. They hoped to expand the scope of their intellectual horizon and consequently their social relevance in a male dominated society. A case in point was d’Aulnoy’s interpolation of her first fairy tale, *L’île de la félicité* (The Island of Happiness) with her novel *Histoire d’Hypolite* (The Story of Hippolytus), published in 1690. Such an authorial arrangement was not a coincidence but a conscious attempt at situating the tale in “a very specific exterior ‘reality’- that of its framing novel”. It enabled d’Aulnoy to project her fairy tale “as a literary rather than an oral genre”26, a change in both plot and structure that unravelled the transforming character of the printed page with its inherent tendency towards refinement and civility. This literary innovation further acted as “a counter-discourse to Louis XIV’s classical tradition by reversing traditional, classical plots”. It set the context for a whole generation of *mondain* authors to “foreground issues important to them … and articulate a need for social change.”27

In this way, d’Aulnoy advanced her own vision of the civilizing process, of women’s desires and aspirations, and above all of their social space. Her determination to free women from the burden of undue social constraints in the marriage economy of seventeenth-century France was an important step in this direction. The subject is brought up in many of her stories, notably in “Prince Marcassin”, where she vigorously denounces the practice of forced and early marriage. To her, this is the fate worse than death that awaits Ismene, the beautiful young girl, who is forced to marry the hideous Prince Marcassin against her will. The prince’s hideous appearance symbolizes the ugliness of forced marriage that strengthens one’s resolve to avoid such an undesirable fate. The same scenario is presented in the tale of “The White Cat” where the very idea of marrying the abhorrent King Migonnet makes the incarcerated young fair princess think of death.

D’Aulnoy’s depiction of forced marriage as a fate worse than death was designed to urge women to explore ways of escaping an unhappy life. This is seen in the story of “The Benevolent Frog” in which d’Aulnoy laments the passive and resigned manner in which the public bade their last farewells and withdrew. “All obeyed, for in those days men were very ignorant and never tried to find remedies for their misfortunes.” Here, the call for self-initiation on the part of women is to empower them to force the public recognition of their right of consent to marriage. The conversation between King Sombre and Princess Trognon in the story of “The Golden Branch” is quite apposite in this context. When approached by King Sombre to give her consent to marry his son, Prince Torticoli, the Princess retorts: “There are things in which we have the power of choice. It has been against my will that I have been brought here. I give you warning, and I shall look upon you as my worst enemy if you force me to consent.”

In d’Aulnoy’s worldview, women’s right of consent to marriage is a celebration of the freedom of love, which she so ardently promotes in all her stories. In the story of “The Hind in the Wood” freedom of love itself becomes the guiding principle for gaining the favour of the loved person. Prince Warrior, whose love for Princess

28 d’Aulnoy, The fairy tales of Madame d'Aulnoy..., 318
Desiré desperately awaits her father’s consent to their marriage, is still reluctant to use unseemly means of attaining her. When his ambassador Becafigue suggests that he should carry her off, “should the king refuse to give him the princess”, Prince Warrior exclaims: “I cannot agree to that; she would be offended at so disrespectful a proceeding.” Similarly, in the story of “The Pigeon and the Dove”, when Prince Constancio is advised by his confidant Mirtain to be more aggressive in approaching Princess Constancia, he replies annoyingly: “I think only of finding favour with this lovely girl, and recognise in her the good breeding that would ill assort with the violent measures you advise…”

**Virtue and Civility as the Defining Features of the Civilizing Process**

If the civilizing process was to be defined from a female perspective, women’s virtue and men’s civility were its principal features, which d’Aulnoy purposefully induced. The former was a self-willed rather than a socially imposed moral command, which she resolved to turn into female strength and the latter a manifest expression of the new cultural ethos commanding respect for women’s sentiments. Both were indicative of a highly distinct social status, and both were to expand women’s social space.

D’Aulnoy concept of virtuous love was geared towards this objective. Not only did it set the standard for perceived cultural and ethical norms from a female perspective, but it conveyed a sense of freedom in women’s assumption of modesty. This is well expressed in the story of “The Golden Branch” wherein the old fairy warns Princess Tragnon of the danger of becoming “coquettish, vain, and very gay”, if she desires beauty. To this, the dreadful looking Tragon replies resolutely: “I would rather have every misfortune in the world than fail in virtue.” Trognon prefers to remain virtuous, because in this way, she “will be good, respected and very humble-minded.”

Remarkably, women’s virtue in d’Aulnoy’s frame of thought acts as a countervailing force against male domination. It is a moral discourse that urges men to respect women’s desires and aspirations, thereby influencing the course of the civilizing

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29. d’Aulnoy, *The Fairy Tales of Madame d’Aulnoy* …, 370, 318, 124, 328, 420, 6, 125, 126.
process in women’s favour. The point is well brought up in the story of “The White Cat” where d’Aulnoy, as Elizabeth Harries points out, transforms “a tale about a wandering princess into a tale about a powerful princess, whose storytelling, both written and oral, is part of her power.” This is equally true of the story of “The Bee and the Orange Tree” in which the compelling nature of women’s virtue alters and refines male behaviour. Here, female strength derives not only from her wit and intelligence but also from her virtue. The latter’s effect is particularly seen in the manner in which the persuasive moral character associated with women's purity conjures up male submission. D’Aulnoy’s description of self-restraint on the part of male lovers in such stories underscores the power of women’s virtue that turns male respect for women into a moral obligation.

Such views constitute the underlying principles in d’Aulnoy’s model of socialization, the very medium through which she promotes her feminized vision of the civilizing process. To be sure, d’Aulnoy does not radically deviate from the prevailing moral values. Being the prisoner of her own time, she vicariously echoes the prevailing social attitudes towards sexuality, embodied for the most part in its relegation of sexual matters to the realm of secrecy. This is reflected in the tone of the Fairy Protectress, as she reproaches the queen for the fallout. “This is the just reward of your fatal curiosity; you have only yourself to thank for the state in which Magotine has brought you.”

Yet such a model does not exclusively target women as the subjects of sexual repression. Nor does it deny their femininity as it gives some recognition of female emotional and erotic existence, though permissible only within the confines of marriage. Here, d’Aulnoy’s sense of morality resonates in some important ways with the concept of childhood innocence, which she integrates into her socialization scheme. Her tacit approval of sexual intimacy within marriage was in full accord with this newly emerged concept. While she was definitely non-descriptive about the act of sexual intercourse between married couples, she did not view it as sinful. In doing so, d’Aulnoy re-enacted the Christian notions of Virgin Mary and innocent child as personified by Jesus Christ,

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30 Harries, *Twice Upon a Time...*, 43.
31 d’Aulnoy, *The Fairy Tales of Madame d'Aulnoy...*, 413, 264.
notions which dispensed with the concept of the original sin altogether. Once considered innocent, children were to be saved from exposure to the corrupting influences of the adult world. In d’Aulnoy’s fairy tales, this often takes the form of confining the newly born child to a castle as a protective measure against possible evils. But when the child, who is for the most part a female, reaches the age of maturity, she breaks free of her confinement and experiences her feminine desires with a male lover whom she ultimately marries.

The liberating potential of childhood innocence for women is particularly expressed in d’Aulnoy’s story of “The Dolphin”. In an effort to prove her virtue and avoid the death penalty to which her child was also subjected, Princess Livorette raises the spectre of her child’s innocence. This is a crucial moment in the story, for by bringing a child to the equation, the princess absolves herself of any wrongdoing which is of a sexual nature. Here, the narrative draws on a Christian paradigm that the child, like Jesus, is the product of an immediate conception and is therefore borne innocent. When Alidor assumes his human shape and lies beside Princess Livorette, the latter is in a profound state of sleep that any mutual sexual engagement between the two is virtually impossible. No single account of Alidor’s experience of lust is given either, apart from his affection for a woman whom he loves dearly.

Failure to observe the rules of sexual innocence leads to dire consequences. This is the message that d’Aulnoy conveys to those who prematurely experience sexual awakening, as in the stories of “Princess Mayblossom” and “Princess Desiree”. In the first story, Princess Mayblossom is overcome by her irresistible urge to see the daylight just shortly before the termination of her seclusion. She looks through a tiny hole, only to cast her eyes on ambassador Fanfarine, a handsome but selfish man with whom she falls in love and with whom she endures great suffering. In the second story, the newly born Princess Desiree is forced to remain in a sealed castle unable to see the daylight until her fifteenth birthday, lest she lose her life. Her failure to abide by the rule of confinement places her in a death-threatening situation, though she emerges unscathed at the end. As d’Aulnoy observed: “Neither heaven nor earth heeded her; she deserved to be punished for neglecting the fairy’s orders.”
D’Aulnoy’s socialization paradigm entails a system of reward and punishment which centres on sexuality. Here, women’s virtue is once again the guiding principle for proper conduct as in the tale of the “Green Serpent” where the indiscreetly curious Queen Laidronette causes misery for acting contrary to what her husband, the invisible king, had advised her. She looks upon him in full light, only to discover his hideous face and thus brings about the misery that befalls them both. The hideous face of the invisible king is a metaphor for the repulsion that an act of this nature can evoke. As the Fairy Protectress reproaches the queen: “This is the just reward of your fatal curiosity; you have only yourself to thank for the state in which Magotine has brought you.”

But whereas the invisible king is expectedly given an extended period of penance, Queen Laidronette learns that it is the chance of regaining her beauty which is deferred. The implication is clear: if women behave coquettishly, not only will they be deprived of their beauty, but they will descend into a lower social status. No wonder, then, that Queen Laidronette’s beauty is ultimately regained, her hardship ended, and her status restored as soon as she drinks from and bathes her face in the water of discretion.

This brings us to the function of virtuous love as a mark of social distinction. Much like civility, virtue was associated with the prerogative of a high culture in tandem with the discourses of early modernity which differentiated the elite from the popular classes alongside sexuality. Shame, virtue, modesty, decency, dignity and civility were seen as attributes of birth, while the opposite qualities were ascribed to inferior classes. This is why most fairy stories, as Dorothy Thelander observes, pay a great deal of attention to detail, “Particularly in the description of their characters’ clothing and appearance”, which is both implicit and explicit indication that “external beauty is a sign of inward virtue and nobility.”

Thus, in d’Aulnoy’s story of “The Blue Bird”, Princess Florine still impresses King Charming as being of a noble class, despite being deprived of her elegant garments and forced to appear slovenly. Her “evident shame” is the sole criterion for the King’s

33. Thelendar, “Mother Goose and Her Goslings…”, 470, 483.
judgement, which leads him to exclaim: “What! So they tell me she could be wicked with that charming look of modesty and gentleness!” As for King Charming, “everything in his mind and person answered to his name.”

Conversely, the mere fact of high birth does not necessarily imply noble human qualities. Rather, it is the person’s character that speaks to his/her rank, as ill-manners and indecency cast doubt on one’s status. This is d’Aulnoy’s point in the story of “Princess Carpillon”. The king’s oldest son is not publicly recognized, because he is seen “in an action so violent and so unworthy of his rank.” A similar scenario appears in the story of “Prince Ariel”, where the visiting ambassadors totally ignore Prince Furiban but pay respect to Leander, the son of the court tutor whom they mistake for the actual prince. Distressed by the incident, the king laments that “the ugly face and the violence of his son should prevent his being recognized.”

These examples suggest that the concepts of virtue and civility overlap in d’Aulnoy’s frame of thought. This emanates from her mixed intellectual predilection, which renders such religiously embedded terms as virtue secular, while portraying new cultural ethos in the light of religious morality. In other words, what is civil has to be virtuous and vice versa, for one represents the other. Thus, a modern personal attribute like emotional intelligence which d’Aulnoy promotes in her story of “The Green Serpent” is as intrinsic to the notion of virtue as it is to the culture of civility. When Princess Laidronette’s sister, Princess Bellotte, and her king/husband give her an old riband for a wedding gift and some purple silk for a petticoat, “she would have thrown the riband and the silk in the faces of the generous donors who treated her so ill; but she had too much spirit, wisdom and intelligence to show her annoyance...”

Such overlapping of virtue and civility appears in the story of “Princess Carpillon”, where d’Aulnoy draws on the Socratic tradition, to present a symbiotic relationship between virtue and civility, as vicariously echoed by the fairy Amazon:

34. d’Aulnoy, The Fairy Tales of Madame d’Aulnoy..., 33, 62, 68, 251.
Man’s happiness should not only consist in outward greatness; to be happy you must be virtuous, and to be virtuous you must know yourself. You must be able to restrain your desires, to be as contented in mediocrity as in opulence. You must gain the esteem of men of merit.\textsuperscript{35}

That virtue and civility together with merit constitute important criteria for defining status in society is expressed by the dolphin: “When heaven does not place us in that position in which one would have desired to be born, only virtue and merit can repair the loss…” The remark is in accordance with the imperatives of the age which privilege civility and merit over birth, a contextual framework within which d’Aulnoy’s vision of government and her model of socialization are formulated.

The absolutist nature of the French state during the reign of Louis XIV was at odds with the aspirations of the patrician elite who sought greater participation in the political affairs of the state. To resolve the conflict, the dissident elite found it imperative to contrive a system of government that not only would limit the power of the king, but it would make full use of their own knowledge and expertise. As for d’Aulnoy, the solution rested primarily on redefining the nature of political authority in the light of the Platonic concept of the philosopher king, which by giving priority to virtue and knowledge over power, sought to establish a just rule. To this end, she greatly expanded on her model of socialization to extend the scope of its moral and cultural injunctions to the political realm. Hence, virtue, knowledge and civility which were hitherto considered personal attributes became an integral part of the individual’s aptitude in assuming political authority. This revised notion of governance is manifested in the story of “The Bee and the Orange Tree”, where the king entrusts his brother with the task of choosing from among his sons “the one most worthy of reigning”, the choice falls on the second son “whose character so well befitted his high birth that every desirable quality was found in him to perfection.”\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} d’Aulnoy, \textit{The Fairy Tales of Madame d'Aulnoy...}, 277-78.
\textsuperscript{36} d’Aulnoy, \textit{The Fairy Tales of Madame d'Aulnoy...}, 527, 413.
More to the point is d’Aulnoy’s depiction of the character, “King Sublime”, in the story of “Princess Carillon”, who personifies the ideal ruler. He is a king as well as a philosopher who lives in disguise as a shepherd, combining virtuous knowledge with civility and oblivious to worldly desires and possessions. D’Aulnoy’s use of the adjectival word sublime as a noun in the story is a clear indication of her idealized notion of a perfect rule. Concomitantly, d’Aulnoy’s dictum that the state should be receptive to the civilizing influence of women as a guiding principle of social progress finds expression in the acquiescence of King Sublime to the moral command of the Fairy Amazon who, among other things, instructs him to socialize the forsaken young prince in a manner consistent with his own moral philosophy.37

So viewed, d’Aulnoy’s fairy tales were not particularly intended for children. This is evident from her writing style, which, as Elizabeth Harries points out, “tends to be long, complex, often full of digressive episodes and decorative detail.”38 But, since subsequent fairy tales were primarily aimed at children, d’Aulnoy’s writing came to be seen in a similar fashion. Thus, Anne Thacheray Ritchie in the preface to her English translation of d’Aulnoy’s fairy tales wrote in 1892: “I have been asked to write a few lines of preface to the stories which are here once more, after a century or so, presented in a new form to the present generation of children.”39 There was no such continuity in fact. Suffice it to say that even the Grimm’s Children’s and Household Tales was not originally intended for children. It was only in 1823 that “under the pressures of success and popular demand” they shifted their focus to children, with the publication of fifty illustrated tales, which “became the source of thousands of children’s storybooks at home and abroad.”40

D’Aulnoy wrote for the edification of young minds, but her primary audience was the parents and guardians who had to carry out the task. Surely enough, d’Aulnoy’s stories, as already noted, were quite effusive in clamouring for the edification of the

37. d’Aulnoy, The Fairy Tales of Madame d’Aulnoy..., 143, 277.
38. Harries, Twice Upon a Tine..., 32.
young minds, but carrying out the task rest completely with parents and guardians. This is evident from the episodic order of the stories that carries a thematic significance. They begin with a group of fairies visiting a queen upon childbirth to offer advice on how best the newly born prince or princess should be raised. Nowhere in the stories does d’Aulnoy place children under psychological pressure in order to comply with the moral and cultural dictates, except on rare occasions when they are placed under the custody of the fairies. These two facets of d’Aulnoy’s narrative structure leave little doubt that the moral of the stories was essentially meant for an adult audience, as were the tales themselves. Among her audience, women undoubtedly constituted the core. As Harris points out, her fairy tales had to do with women’s “exploration of the psychology and limitations of their political and artistic power.”

The Civilizing Mission and d’Aulnoy’s Political Ethics

D’Aulnoy’s attempt at producing morally wholesome and culturally refined individuals was not an end in itself. There was a political purpose to her socialization scheme whose objective, as already noted, was to create the political underpinning of the nation-state. This is the message she conveys to the elite with a view to urging change in contemporary state policy. Her cast of characters consists almost exclusively of members of the royal family. Pursuit of virtue and civility is first and foremost incumbent upon the ruling class as both an individual enterprise and as a political assignment. In this respect, her fairy tales mark the first attempt at the political socialization of children in European history, but of the kind that was primarily geared towards restructuring the nature of political authority and governance.

D’Aulnoy’s political philosophy was in some ways an expansion of Erasmus’s concept of “Christian Prince”, which he had outlined in his treatise, The Institutio Principis Christiani a century and a half earlier. The latter differed only in so far as it confined the authority of the sovereign within the principles of Christian dogma. Being a staunch Christian, Erasmus cast his ideal king in a religious mould, going so far as to

41. Harries, Twice Upon a Time..., 44.
argue that “a true philosopher and a true Christian are one and the same in fact.” Yet, his vision of governance was as much informed by the Platonic concept of the Philosopher king as that of his predecessors. Erasmus’s dictum that “it is far better to be a just man than an unjust prince,” reflects a shift in the nature of political authority that is no longer oppressive but rests on a contract between the ruler and the ruled. This clearly echoes his vision of the new era as he cautions the young prince Charles that once “you hold people bound to you by fear, you do not possess them even half. You have their physical bodies but their spirits are estranged from you.”

Thus viewed, d’Aulnoy entire project of political socialization is inherited from Erasmus’s notion of soft power which he put forth as an alternate method of exercising political authority. The focus was on the education of the youth with emphasis on the reformation of manners. He was convinced that by “accustoming the people by example and precept to the principles of right and wrong”, there would be "no need of many laws or punishments", and that "the people will of their own free will follow the course of right.” For this reason, he insisted that the prince should in person participate in "public affairs" and conduct himself "in such a manner that he does some good by his very presence."

However, the historical trend did not tally with d’Aulnoy’s mode of political socialization. Nor did her feminized vision of the civilizing process have much success within a patriarchal system. She was, no doubt, the “mistress of the fairy tale”, the master being Charles Perrault. The latter skilfully interlaced the social and political implications of the fairy tale in a manner that primarily served the interests of the state. This rewriting of the fairy tale had much to do with Perrault’s mixed worldviews: while

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being receptive to new ideas, he echoed the political and religious conservatism of the ruling elite.⁴⁷

**The Civilizing Process and Perrault’s Political Socialization of Children**

As a male author with strong connections to the court of Louis XIV, Perrault shared neither d’Aulnoy’s views of governance nor her cultural perspective. His goal consisted, first and foremost, of legitimizing the absolutism of Louis XIV by producing obedient citizens, thereby serving the will of the king. Unlike d’Aulnoy who expanded and popularized Erasmus’s political philosophy in its entirety, Perrault embraced only a single aspect of it by solely accentuating his discourse on the reformation of manners. In doing so, he made childhood discipline central to his literary enterprise, with a view to producing a compliant, dutiful and diligent citizenry. No wonder that he dedicated the first printed edition of his *Histoires ou Contes du Temps passé* in 1697 to the niece of Louis XIV. This state-oriented goal had a profound impact on the nature of the fairy tale as it shifted the secular message inherent in the genre to children. More specifically, it endowed the genre with a new mission, namely the political socialization of children, informed by childhood innocence and consistent with political and ideological imperatives of the state. Henceforth, childhood discipline became the focal point of the fairy tale, a tradition that was inherited by successive authors of the genre, notably the Grimms.

This is not to suggest that childhood discipline had been absent in pre-modern era, but that with the onset of modernity it underwent a transformation. A comparison between the classics and the modern shows the changing nature of discipline from parental concern to institutionalized form of control. Perhaps the earliest and most explicit references to the question of child discipline are given by Plato who declared:

> Shall we allow our children to listen to any stories written by anyone, and to form opinions the opposite of those we think they should have when they grow up?!

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⁴⁷ For a brief discussion of Perrault’s ideology see D.J. Culpin, “The Exotic and the Creative Imagination in the 1690s: Charles Perrault’s *Les Hommes Illustres*”, *Eighteenth-Century Life* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 82.
We certainly shall not. Then it seems that our first business is to supervise the production of stories, and choose only those we think suitable, and reject the rest.\(^{48}\)

Plato’s insistence on the intellectual supervision of children was nothing more than an expression of parental concern shared by many who sought to mould their young in their own image. He did not prescribe a form of collective surveillance over children in the same manner that the early modern pedagogues advocated. This notion of discipline continued until the Renaissance, even as it was accompanied with physical punishment. Straparola’s tale of Priest Zefiro and a fig-stealing youth (night six, story five) is a case in point. Therein, acts of bodily violence such as hurling stones at the perpetrator convincingly “excel both herbs and words in persuasive powers.”\(^{49}\) Like stones, herbs and words had “hidden virtues”, but not powerful enough to persuade the lad to climb down the fig tree, seeing that Zefiro’s recourse to words simply failed to produce the desired effect. It was upon this failure that

He [the priest] began to hurl stones at the thief with great rancour and fury, smiting him now on the arm, now on the leg, now on the spine...that at last the youth, swollen and bethumped and bruised as he was on account of the frequent blows he had received, was obliged to come down from his perch. He then took to flight, having first given back to Pre Zefiro all the figs which he had stowed away in his bosom.\(^{50}\)

The moral of the story echoes Straparola’s own belief in the appropriate use of brute force as an effective means of ensuring proper behaviour: “…stones proved themselves to be more potent as instruments of exorcism than either words or herbs.”\(^{51}\) This does not mean that there weren’t advices to the contrary, but that they for the most


\(^{49}\) Straparola, *The Nights of Straparola*, vol.1, 38.

\(^{50}\) Straparola, *The Nights of Straparola*, vol.1, 39.

\(^{51}\) Straparola, *The Nights of Straparola*, vol.1, 39.
part remained unheeded. There were of course a number of manuals on the importance of civility in children that appeared in the sixteenth century such as Erasmus’ *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium* (On Civility in Children) (1530), Giovanni *Della Casa’s Galateo* (1558), and C. Calviac’s *Civilité* (1560). But all these manuals did not address children directly; they were written solely for parental use, for the simple reason that the responsibility of upbringing children rested with parents. As Erasmus in fact pointed out:

> To be a true father, you must take absolute control of your son’s entire being; and your primary concern must be for that part of his character which distinguishes him from the animals and comes closest to reflecting the divine….Is there any form of exposure more cruel than to abandon to bestial impulses children whom nature intended to be raised according to upright principles and to live a good life? 52

By the time d’Aulnoy and Perrault began to pen their magic tales, the carnal element of the human body as the locus of discipline had lost much of its relevance. Instead, the vagary of the mind became the subject of intense disciplinary probing. The diffusión of print culture set the trend. It changed the relation between the sword and the word by endowing the latter with the power to censor and alter human behaviour. The ubiquitous and persuasive character of the printed page effectively gave rise to new cultural and moral codes, which radically redefined the old values in light of the new social impulses. The focus was primarily on civility and virtue which spawned an entire movement aimed at establishing a set of human characteristics as important criteria of social distinction. After all, in the world of cultural refinement, “the significance of class difference appears to be ameliorated by the individual’s possession of moral purity, honesty and bravery.”53 As such, the movement introduced a set of cultural ethos and moral values that constituted the guiding principles for proper behaviour.

This is precisely the time when the fairy tale increasingly became a medium of exercising discipline, a trend that characteristically began with Perrault. After all, children’s literature in general and fairy tales in particular, to use Zipes’ words, “were written with the purpose of socializing children to meet definite normative expectations at home and in public sphere.”54 Historically, the development of European fairy tale had its roots in the post-Gutenberg tradition of the children’s Bibles, which taught “far more than Bible content”, with the intention of “changing manners, morals, ideals, and concerns.” The effort “to use the Bible to shape a meaningful present had produced Bible stories that mingle sacred text with secular values.”55 The process ultimately took a full secular turn, for while men of the early modern period espoused the moralizing lessons of Christianity, they jettisoned its supernatural dimension. As Jane Mitchell points out, in contrast to Christian morality which “taught man how to live in God’s world”, modern discipline “simply replaced God’s world with an Other World [the world of fairies] peopled with good and bad creatures who were rewarded or punished according to their nature.”56 Consequently, censorship as an integral part of religious discipline proliferated and became an extensive field in the realm of culture and ideology. This explains the changing character of discipline which began asserting itself in an indirect but more effective fashion.

Thus, for the early modern figures like Algernon Sidney (1623-1683), the English political theorist, the goal was fundamentally to devise some sort of disciplinary system whereby the youth “became laws to themselves”, and that “this integrity of manners made the laws as it was useless.”57 This was in fact what Perrault, his French near-contemporary, tried to achieve in his fairy-tale compositions through psychological persuasion of children, should they be disobedient or ill-mannered. Speaking on the subject, he stated:

No matter how frivolous and bizarre all these fables are in their adventures, it is certain that they arouse a desire in children to resemble those whom they see become happy and at the same time a fear of the misfortunes which befall wicked characters because of their wickedness.\textsuperscript{58}

Both Perrault’s and Sidney’s remarks reveal important features of modern discipline, which, in the Foucauldian sense, is characterized by a shift away from the subjugation of the body to psychological manipulation of the mind. Therein lies the power of the word that elevated the pervasive nature of disciplinary measures to the level of “an institutionalized discourse with manipulation as one of its components.”\textsuperscript{59} This particular aspect of modern discipline owed much of its vigour to the ascent of the print culture, which diffused the rules of hierarchy and subordination through stories for generations of children. As Jacqueline Rose points out: "If children's fiction builds an image of the child with the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp."\textsuperscript{60}

Viewed from this perspective, childhood as a concept was primarily a literary construction that made its appearance in children’s literature in the post-Renaissance era. In Perrault’s case, this was done through the taming of the previous tales and the elimination of “raucous sexuality” from them.\textsuperscript{61} For this reason, he introduced a simpler mode of expression that replaced the prolonged and often convoluted narrative style of the tales. Henceforth, fairy tales increasingly became identified with “that Simplicity and Taste and Manners” which Sara Fielding, the English educator, in her 1749 \textit{Governess}, scrupulously looked for in her selection of children’s stories.\textsuperscript{62} Here, simplicity was the preferred style for protecting childhood innocence as stated by John Edward Taylor, the English translator of Basile’s \textit{Cunto de li Cunti}, who omitted twenty out of fifty stories

\textsuperscript{58} Quoted in Zipes, \textit{Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion...}, 17.
\textsuperscript{59} Zipes, \textit{Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion...}, 10.
\textsuperscript{60} Jacqueline Rose, \textit{The Case of Peter Pan: or The Impossibility of Children's literature} (London: Macmillan, 1984), 2.
\textsuperscript{61} Bottigheimer, \textit{Fairy Tales: A New History}, 87, 89.
\textsuperscript{62} Harries, \textit{Twice Upon a Time...}, 84.
from the collection, on the ground that they were “inadmissible” and “objectionable”. In the second edition of the book in 1912, a similar concern was expressed by its editor Helen Zimmern who believed that “gross licentious language [and] impropriety intermingled with but too many of the tales rendered [them] unfit for youthful reader.” She went on to say: “I have therefore been obliged to revise many pages, omitting offensive words and expressions and adapting the stories to the juvenile ears.” Equally scrupulous were Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm who in the preface to the 1819 edition of their Kinder-und Hausmärchen wrote: “In this new edition we have carefully removed every expression inappropriate for children.”

What is more, Perrault’s new style meant speaking to children directly, an approach that served as a manual of manners (Erziehungsbuch), and was subsequently developed by the Brothers Grimm in their Children’s and Household Tales. This further entailed the concealment of the active presence of ideology through fantasy and entertainment that became an effective means of socializing the young. For, ideology as Christian Zimmer points out:

…does not have a real language and especially not one of violence. Its total lack of aggression, its capacity to transform itself into everything, its infinite malleability, permits it to assume the mask of innocence and neutrality. And above all, as I have said, to blend itself with reality itself. Finally, its most supreme ruse is to delimit a kind of preserved secteur which it has called amusement (divertissement) and which it has cut off from reality by decree – always menaced as such by subversion … (Moreover it acts on two level: That of daily life and that of the lapse of the daily, the dream, the imaginary).

64. Basile, Taylor, and Zimmern, The Pentameron or the Story of Stories..., vii, ix.
Amusement is thus a direct creation of ideology. It is always alienation in power.
To amuse oneself is to disarm oneself.\(^{67}\)

All this was in tune with the grand strategy of the absolutist state that sought to mould the personality structure of the citizenry in accordance with its civilizing mission, often through the pedagogy of fear. Perrault’s psychogenetic exertions on children were part of the same strategy aimed at altering the young minds in accordance with the ideological imperatives of dominant male elite. In doing so, Perrault sets his magic tales within a system of reward and punishment that could most perceptibly produce the desired effect. Commending the works of his predecessors who set a model for his own, he observed:

They all tend to reveal the advantage in being honest, patient, prudent, industrious, obedient and the evil which can befall them if they are not that way. Sometimes the fairies give a gift to a young girl who answers them with civility, and with each word that she speaks, a diamond or pearl falls from her mouth. And another girl who answers them brutally has a frog or a toad fall from her mouth. Sometimes there are children who become great lords for having obeyed their father or mother, or others who experience terrible misfortune for having been vicious and disobedient. No matter how frivolous and bizarre all these fables are in their adventures, it is certain that they arouse a desire in children to resemble those whom they see become happy and at the same time a fear of the misfortunes which befall wicked characters because of their wickedness.\(^{68}\)

Perrault’s innovative use of this system of reward and punishment was in some measures the continuation of the tradition of rise tales, although its focus and scope markedly differed from those of his predecessors. If Straparola’s fairy tales rendered personalendeavour an effective means of upward social mobility, those of Perrault


accentuated civility and refined manners for social advancement. The latter became the staple of child discipline, which Perrault sought to enforce by reminding children of the consequence of their actions. This was a more systematic but unmediated method of regulating children’s behaviour, in that children themselves became the target audience of disciplinary moral injunctions. This set the context for a new trend that ushered in the reversal of the parental role in the child’s early education by the state.

The shift of focus to childhood had important cultural ramifications as it set off a much stricter interpretation of the perceived social norms. One such ramification was a change in the human perception of animals, much in line with the separation of the two species. This was a symbol of the growing human distance from his/her animality which for the power elite was emblematic of rough manners and unfettered sexuality. Thus whereas in d'Aulnoy's magic tales animals appear as human companions, in Perrault's they are often portrayed as ferocious creatures whose presence is to be feared. Their ferocity is suggestive of aggressive sexual instinct, which ought to be avoided or tamed as in his cautionary tale of “Little Red Riding Hood”. Unlike its earlier versions where the protagonist represents a fearless village girl, here, she is portrayed as an innocent urban girl whose failure to follow parental advice causes her to fall prey to a sexual predator in the guise of a wolf. Beyond being a cautionary tale, the narrative structure of the story knits together in a subtle manner girlhood with childhood, thus setting the tone for the repression of women’s sexuality.

This was in contrast to d’Aulnoy who shared none of the sexual symbolisms associated with ferocious animals. She did not subscribe to the idea that sexuality is all an inept act, attributable only to animals. In fact, she went so far as to give a transcendental view of human sexuality based on the interplay of nature and culture that leaves little room for sexual repression. Her tale of "Prince Ariel" is a case in point where she rather approvingly brings up the subject of female sexual desire. She vicariously challenges the opinion that banishing “one’s sex is a sure means of securing calm

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delights.”

The ultimate union between Ariel and the princess of 'Calm Delight' is clearly in keeping with d'Aulnoy's accentuation of the need for the expression of feminine emotions.

**Perrault’s Fairy Tales and Modern Patriarchy**

With the rise in popularity of Perrault's magic tales, the redemptive character of female sexuality in d'Aulnoy’s fairy tales was overturned. This was symptomatic of male dominance over the print culture and by extension the socialization process. Here again the concept of childhood served the purpose as it increasingly become part of the dominant discourse that targeted not only children but also women and a broad spectrum of adults, including the elite classes. While it set the standard behaviour for aristocratic families, it subjected women and the inarticulate majority to a system of surveillance, treating all as children. Zornado’s remark speaks to the point: "Regardless of race, class, or gender, each individual was first a child in the dominant culture”, and that “the hierarchical ideology of the institution lived in each individual, having been exposed to it since birth.”

As for women, Perrault’s perception of them as being socially inadequate was part of a strategy aimed at their exclusion. The strategy entailed muting the female voice by denigrating women writers as storytellers (men as story writer), thereby reducing their literary work to old wives’ tales. Pejoratively presented as low class, “primitive”, and typical of “undeveloped people”, the attribution of oral tradition to women increasingly drove them to the fringes of society. Little wonder then that in Perrault’s frontispiece woman the storyteller is portrayed alongside a distaff, a scene that in Harries’s observation stands as a symbolic representation of her domesticity. Consequently, with Perrault the concept of the heroine character began to disappear, since such stories, as Ruth Bottigheimer points out, “have produced modern fairy-tale heroines, whose

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narrative trajectories, motif constellations, and guiding motivations are subject to male dominance, the dark star of their narratives.”

What Perrault sought to accomplish was in response to the prevailing male mentality of the time that tended to preclude the female character body from both within and without the story line. Thus, in the entire two volumes of *Les Hommes Illustres* (1696 and 1700) containing “one hundred pen-portraits of famous men of the seventeenth century” there are virtually no women. The same mentality continued throughout as can be deduced from the remark by the Grimm Brothers, whose praise of Perrault let them to disparage women writers:

> France must surely have more [fairy tales] than those given by Charles Perrault, who alone still treated them as children’s tales (not so his inferior imitators, Aulnoy, Murat); he gives us only nine, certainly the best known and also among the most beautiful.

Perrault’s suppression of the female voice was not only carried out by divesting it of its intellectual vigour, but also by depicting women as “mute sexualized objects”, bereft of sexual desire. This was in tune with the modern discourses on sexuality, which, beginning in the seventeenth century, laid down strict rules on individual sexual conduct, an event of historical significance of which Michel Foucault has been the outstanding commentator.

By positing women as intellectually inferior, sexualizing such inferiority, and stripping them of their language of desire, Perrault introduced an important element of

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75. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* lacks an exposition of the manner in which the imposition of repressive sexual policies often met with resistance. His rather lengthy discussion of de Sade as a symbol of resistance to the dominant discourses of sexuality is but a male-oriented historical reconstruction which takes no notice of the female experience. This is where women writers like d’Aulnoy become of vital importance, since their writings stand as testimony to the fact that the repression of female sexuality did not go unchallenged. In the literary realm, women produced their own counter discourses to the dominant discourses of sexuality, although it was the latter which ultimately triumphed.
systemic gender differentiation to his aristocratic reading public. This was complemented by social distinctions, old and new, in terms of class, race, and status. Such distinctions, observes Zipes, helped “advance the cause of civilité with explicit and implicit rules of pedagogization so that the manners and mores of the young would reflect the social power, prestige, and hierarchy of the ruling class.”

It is no coincidence that Perrault’s princesses often appear to be beautiful but devoid of intelligence. This is for the most part seen in the tale of “Ricky of The Tuft”, a prince who lacks human form but possesses ‘plenty of brains’. In contrast, a princess from the neighbouring kingdom is completely devoid of common sense, notwithstanding her dazzling beauty. She had been destined to be deficient in intelligence right from the moment she was born; a fate which even her good fairy mother could not have altered. Yet, the princess is gifted with “the power of making handsome any person who shall please her.”

At the end of the story the princess uses her magic power to turn Ricky of the Tuft into the most attractive man, so much for the love he felt for her. But no transformation of the senseless princess into a sober and intelligent person takes place. This confirms what Zipes calls “the superiority of male intelligence over female beauty”, but also the conventional view that the latter is to serve men’s desire in recognition of male superiority in rational and intellectual terms.

This differential representation of gender role, consistent with his feminized concept of childhood as a discourse of elite/male domination, is an integral part of Perrault’s patriarchal ideology which is vigorously expressed in his tale of “Patient Griselda”. Here, the ideal wife is described as “a young beauty without pride and vanity, obedient, with tried and proved patience, and above all, without a domineering will of her own.” This appears in the person of a young shepherdess, Griselda, who just prior to being wedded to her royal suiter swears thus: “If I were to marry the least important man in the world, I should agree to obey him. His yoke would be a gentle one for me. How

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76. Zipes, Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion..., 8.
77. Perrault, Perrault’s Complete Fairy Tales, 74.
78. Zipes, Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion..., 34.
much rather, then, would I obey you if I found you my lord and master.” Even when she endures a long period of suffering inflicted by her husband, Griselda remains as obedient and loving as she had declared herself to be. "I must obey", she constantly reminds herself, reflecting that: "Let us be happy, then, in this harsh but worthwhile severity. For one is often happy only as one suffers." Again, when the prince informs Griselda of his intention to take another wife who would be a match for him, the latter consents, adding that, "You are my husband, my lord and master...and whatever else you may hear, you must remember that nothing is nearer my hearth than to obey you completely." On yet another occasion, Griselda goes as far as to state: "I can bear the load of my own sorrow, but I cannot, my lord, endure your anger." Towards the end of the story, it becomes clear that Griselda's harsh treatment by her husband was all part of a trial and tribulation that a wife ought to undergo in order to prove allegiance to her husband.

Characteristically, for Perrault the allegiance of a wife to her husband is symptomatic of the individual’s allegiance to the state, embodied in the person of the sovereign. This is the point at which Perrault’s mixed ideology comes to the fore, for while he adheres to the old patriarchal system, he at the same time advocates the capitalist market economy where knowledge, skill, and industry become important criteria for upward social mobility. This is reminiscent of Straparola’s rise tales in which material success catapult a person of humble origin into an inconceivably higher status, the ultimate goal being primarily serving the sovereign. The tale of “Puss in Boots” is of particular relevance here. It is the story of a miller’s youngest son of the three whose father’s death leaves him with no worldly inheritance. All he is left with is a cat, while the first and the second son take possession of the mill and the ass respectively. This is a matter of great concern to the youngest son who worries that his brothers “will be able to get a decent living by joining forces, but for my part, as soon as I have eaten my cat and made a muff out of his skin, I am bound to die of hunger.”

79 Perrault, Perrault’s Complete Fairy Tales, 101, 110-111.
80 Perrault, Perrault’s Complete Fairy Tales, 101, 105, 107-8, 110-11, 16.
However, he soon learns that his share of the inheritance is not so insignificant. The cat is endowed with wit ample enough to help him in his plight. He only needs to provide this shrewd animal with a pouch and a pair of boots to perform ‘cunning tricks’. In his first performance, the cat traps a rabbit which he immediately presents to the king on behalf of the Marquis of Carabas, a name he invents for his master. He then lures a couple of partridges into his bag and again presents them to the king, who is so pleased that he makes a present in return. Having impressed His Majesty in this manner, the cat sets out to do the unthinkable. When the king and his daughter are out by the river one day, the cat performs a series of tricks that eventually bring his master immense wealth and high status.

Having impressed the king with his master’s possessions, the cat takes the clever but dangerous step of dispossessing the ogre who actually owned these properties, including a dazzling castle where he lived. The cat clears the way for the transformation of property rights from the ogre to its master, thus enabling a man of lowly status to rise in the social hierarchy. The story is certainly a rise tale, but one that is set in the context of the modern nation-state. Perrault’s own account of the moral of the story is revealing:

No matter how great may be the advantages
Of enjoying a rich inheritance,
Coming down from father to son,
Most young people will do well to remember
That industry, knowledge and a clever mind\footnote{Perrault, \textit{Perrault's Complete Fairy Tales}, 125.}

The cat’s wit is a metaphor for practical knowledge that almost magically pays off in a society where the old prerogatives are no longer the sole criteria for the acquisition of wealth and power. The transfer of assets from the ogre to the miller’s son signifies the reversal of past practices. Here, the ogre is the symbol of a social parasite who, in the words of Dorothy Thelander, “lives like a noble”, but “he neither looks nor acts like one.” He is a typical “bad landowner” who not only “fails to fulfil his noble
function of caring for his peasants”, but “lacks the Christian virtue of charity.” Hence, as Thelander concludes: “He must be eliminated, since he can never be reformed.”82 The moral of the story suggests that knowledge and expertise may be of value only in so far as they serve a higher goal. Perrault sees the prospect of wealth, power, and fame for enterprising individuals only when their properties are used productively, and whose intelligence, vision, and advice are to serve the interests of the nation-state.

If in Perrault’s nation-state the individual citizen was obliged to serve the central authority, he/she was also a child, who was expected to behave in a certain manner. Civility was the catch word which in Perrault’s magic tales as in d’Aunoy’s was tied to the notion of upward social mobility. In “Beauty and the Beast” Perrault once again prefigures the importance of civility as a cultural underpinning of the early modern era. He tells the story of a young beauty who is willing to sacrifice her life in order to save her father, an act which gives her a “virtuous character”. But Perrault is less concerned with virtue as an exclusively female attribute than the male quality of civility that induces love and respect. The Beast’s gentility and tenderness compensates for his hideous appearance and artlessness. Upon entering the Beast’s splendid castle, the Beauty is much astonished by the sight of “a large bookcase, a harpsichord” and above all a door to a magnificent room “on which were the words ‘Beauty’s Room’.” Her wonderment grows as she is shown so much kindness and courtesy in so ugly a monster who is soon to take her life. “May I watch you have your supper?” asks the monster. “You are master here”, replies the Beauty. “No, no, it is you who are mistress”, protests the Beast, “you have only to tell me to go, if my presence annoys you, and I will go immediately.”

Thus while Beauty cannot hide her true feeling that the Beast is indeed “very ugly”, she considers him “very kind”, telling him that “[w]hen I think of that you no longer seem to be ugly.” Ultimately, the Beast’s show of respect for the beauty and his understanding of her emotional need kindles deep love in the Beauty, making her wonders: “Why did I not wish to marry him [the Beast]? He is good, and that makes up

82. Thelander, Mother Goose and Her Goslings…”, 485-86.
for all the rest.” Thereupon the Beast is transformed into ‘a prince, more beautiful than the Love himself, who thanked her for having put an end to his enchantment.’ What the story tries to convey is quite clear: civility prevails over apparent beauty and intelligence; and it becomes an important criterion for judging worth and status in society.

**Culture versus Nature**

Although Perrault’s masterful insinuation of bourgeois manners and ethics to young minds was a step forward in cultural refinement, it had long-term implications for children reared in this fashion. They were forced to measure up to an idealized image of childhood, to restrain their instincts, and to behave in ways consistent with the decorum specified by adults. Consequently, they had to act against their inner selves to become incarcerated adults without having experienced the spontaneity of childhood. This was in the nature of a personality split manifesting itself in a sharp distinction between childhood and adulthood that emerged as an offshoot of the civilizing process. It happened by "increased social proscription of many impulses, by their repression from the surface of social life and of consciousness", which resulted in the increased “distances between the personality structure and behavior of adults and children....”

All this overturned the pre-modern conception of man in harmony with nature and capable of expressing emotions free of cultural constraints. The reversal was marked by a growing conflict between the two levels of human existence - the conscious and the unconscious - a conflict that has since become a central focus of modern philosophy and subsequently of Freudian psychoanalysis. In this respect, the observation by Hugh M. Davidson is instructive. He argues that while for many of us today it is inconceivable to think of “the mind without distinguishing between conscious and unconscious spheres in mental life and without assigning some degree of priority to the latter in creative activity, the opposite was equally obvious in the seventeenth century...” Referring to examples from the art and literature of the period, he further points out that “conscious mental activity – conceiving, judging, reasoning, imagining, feeling, remembering –

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predominate in artistic and intellectual invention; they throw light on the darker, more instinctive side of the soul, and serve to bring it into the sphere of morality and art.”

What is of relevance here is how the disjunction between nature and culture detached the child from his/her social environment, and ultimately from society at large. In medieval culture, the child learned who he or she was by performing certain tasks; modern culture by contrast simply dictated to the child who he or she ought to be. In the latter case, the emphasis is on retaining class and gender distinctions to reproduce the dominant culture and ideology. The socialization of children, initially those of the elite families, into observing dress codes and table manners, adopting certain gestures and postures, and respecting female virtue, all constituted important aspects of early education that aimed at transforming them into future subjects.

If early education both at home and at school established the cultural and ideological superiority of one class in a given nation-state, so did the pursuit of higher education. Being confined primarily to the children of the elite, it prepared them for their future role as leaders and reproduced the ideology appropriate to that condition. Nevertheless, modern education in the new age was also tasked with reducing the distance between the people and the state, and it elevated to prominence individuals from outside the aristocracy. The expansion of the machinery of state, the need for new skills and expertise, and the growing web of human relationships, to recall Elias’ account, all contributed to the political assertion of the bourgeoisie.

Yet the concept of nation as an emerging political entity in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century was far from being encompassing. It was restrictive in concept, and the prolonged competitions between influential interest groups for the control of political and other capital effectively excluded those lower down the social hierarchy. The inclusion of the multitude in the concept of the nation began with the French Revolution and was carried forward with mass politics later in the nineteenth century. Accordingly, the use of the fairy tale as a medium of transmitting the dominant

social mores and cultural values to the children of the underprivileged only began with the Grimms’ tradition of the *Märchen* (folktale).

There were several reasons for the delay in the inclusion of the masses as target audience for socialization. First, with the death of prominent fairy tale writers, including Perrault, (and that of Louis XIV in 1715) Lydie Jean observes, “died a lifestyle, a whole frame of mind.” It was the end of an era in which “the fairy tales of *précieux* were quickly forgotten.” Second, the growing Enlightenment preoccupation with political and philosophical issues revealed that “The spirit of the century did not favour fairy tales, and the values of the time were in almost total contradiction to those of the *Contes*.” Third, the tales produced in bourgeois salons had never been very popular among the common people. They had been composed for an upper-class audience receptive to new ideas but averse to popular culture, and this was reflected in “the patronizing attitude of the grand bourgeois toward the lower classes and their traditions.” 86 The same attitude was also dominant among the men of Enlightenment, who, as Chisick points out: “were as concerned with enlightenment spreading too fast, or too far, as with the effects of ignorance.” After all, “[t]he *philosophes* and other educated men of the time were aware of the social utility of ignorance and illusion, and they were less concerned with enlightening the lower classes that occupational training, economic utility and social control.” 87 The fourth reason may be attributed to the lack of popular interest in taking part in national politics which was dominated by the elite classes, not to mention the ancient regime's system of "privilege" that denied the masses entry into the process of nation building.

By the nineteenth century - after the French Revolution - the concept of nation was considerably enlarged to embrace hitherto neglected segments of society, and this certainly had its impact on the growing importance of the fairy tale as a medium of socialization. The Industrial Revolution created the material conditions for this process of inclusion. In this respect, the Chartist Movement that erupted in the wake of the

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Reform Act of 1832 in Great Britain was a landmark which had expanded the right of representation to parts of the working class and in doing so expanded the scope of national politics. The post-Napoleon Germany, to which we shall refer in the next chapter, is another example where the political assertion of diverse social groups gave laid the foundation for the multi-class character of German nation.

This process of inclusion was accelerated with the rise of a mass reading public - which proceeded alongside the dramatic expansion of cheap publications - that radically altered the European political landscape in ways which would have been inconceivable in the past. After all, “the social function of reading”, as Jack Zipes points out, may not be reduced to “solely a safeguard for bourgeois hegemony.” While it is true that the printing press helped diffuse the dominant discourse, it is also true that print culture endowed the popular classes with a new medium of expression as well as “a value system and social status, depending on their conformity to norms controlled by bourgeois interests.”

To this end, folkloric materials such as myths, legends, and fables were appropriated in a manner as to help disseminate the dominant norms and values to the entire society, often in an acceptable format that mirrored the original. The focus was on the use of a familiar language that made it possible for “the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong, the powerful and the marginalized” alike to “share and participate in the dominant ideology.”

88 Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*..., 55.
89 Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*..., 55. It could be argued that while the intention of those who controlled the print medium hoped that it would serve to stabilize the status quo, there is an equally convincing argument that popular access to printed matter could de-stabilize it. Nowhere was this contradiction more evident than in the 1808 Parliamentary Debates about compulsory education which ultimately failed - and was not realized for more than sixty years - as conservatives were afraid that rather than reading the Bible, the popular classes might be more likely to read Thomas Paine's works which they thought would spread the radical ideas of the French Revolution. This is in fact what happened as is evidenced from historical documents. See for example John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intellectuals* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), and Johnathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working-Class* (New Haven, CT : Yale University Press, 2001)
90 Zornado, *Inventing the Child*..., xvii.
further expanded not only in its inclusion of children of the poor and the underclass, but also by making the child image a symbol of cultural purity and an agent of change in the age of modern nation-state, both of which bestowed upon the child a reverend status. In the next chapter, I shall discuss these themes with reference to the Grimms’ fairy tales.
Chapter V: The Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm and the Political Socialization of Children in the Age of Nationalism

Historical Background
In the preceding chapter, I outlined some of the historical variables that significantly expanded the concept of nation, nationality and nationhood. In nineteenth-century Germany the quest for national unity and cultural identity played an important part in enlarging the concept. This was manifested in the political participation of a broad spectrum of social forces, including the underclass, in the process of nation-building. The role of the German language was especially decisive in the creation of a nationalist ideology that had a universal appeal beyond the elite classes, a factor that accounted for the multi-class character of German nationalism. That Germany took the initiative in presenting an all-encompassing model of nationalism was only logical, given her lead in children’s literature, in particular the fairy tale, which functioned as an effective mode of socialization. The Grimms’ *Children’s and Household Tales* are exemplary in this respect. Albeit they were compiled in response to the specific conditions of Germany, they also had a wide reception throughout Europe. But beyond its popularity, the Grimms’ fairy tales may serve as a historical document that reveals the conceptual emergence of childhood as it interacts with the historical mutations of the period. From this perspective, the concept of childhood is expanded and elevated from the individual to the national level. In the latter case, an entire nation is called into action, to be socialized into behaving in a certain way, to be conscious of its identity and advance itself to the level of other industrialized nations. This is yet another historical implication of childhood that I explore in this chapter.

The process of nation-building in Germany began in the last three decades of the eighteenth century with the evolution of the German literary enterprise from being an offshoot of the French children’s literature to one that came to dominate the European cultural scene. Not only did it give a special hue to German nationalist ideology, but it also laid the foundation for a universally shared Western culture. The appearance in 1772 of the first independent German children’s magazine, the *Leipzig Wochenblatt für Kinder*
(Leipzig Children’s weekly), and the influx of similar publications like the *Kinderfreund: Ein Wochenblatt (The Child’s Friend, a Weekly)* in 1775, set the trend. This in turn led to a whole new series of publications such as *Robinson der Jüngere (Robinson the Youth)* in 1779-1780 by Joachim Heinrich Campe, a collection of poems, *Fritzchens Lieder (Freddie’s Songs, 1781)* by Christian Adolf Overbeck, and the *Morlische Elementarbuch (Moral PrePrimer, 1782-1783)* by Christian Gotthil Salzmann, which were innovative in the specific context of Germany. At the core of them lay the child image that stood as a metaphor for natural/cultural purity as well as subjective emotions closely related to national sentiments, both of which became the defining features of German Romanticism.

The political upheavals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were equally crucial in the creation of German nationalist ideology. The French Revolution was particularly inspiring. It brought “Old men like Klopstock and Kant, youths like Friedrich von Gentz and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel” to welcome the revolution “as a blessing for mankind, as a revelation of man's moral character.”¹ Johann Gottfried Herder described it as “the greatest event in our history”, representative of the age of “justice, wisdom, fairness and harmony.”² Others like the poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), the German philosopher and reformer, perceived it in the same light, calling it “the century’s most noble deed” and “a source of inspiration” respectively.³

If revolutionary France infused into the German minds such novel concepts as liberty, justice, and equality, the era of the Napoleonic rule generated the hope of a strong and unified Germany. Hegel’s concept of “the ideal state” was a celebration of the latter, centred around and enacted by a heroic figure, “Zwingherr”, “who would impose unity and greatness upon the Germans.”⁴ Hegel’s idealized hero was none other than Napoleon,

Napoleon, a figure hailed by a whole generation of the German intellectuals, who saw in him the hopes of fulfilling the German dream of a regenerated and unified state. The introduction by Napoleon of the first German constitution after the French model and the implementation of the Code Napoleon in 1807 were in tune with this dream. Napoleon’s territorial reshuffling served the purpose as it helped unify the fragmented German states. A case in point was Napoleon’s integration of sixteen German states in 1806 to form the Confederation of the Rhine (*Rheinbund*).

If Napoleon’s territorial integration of German states created a more unified political structure, his military conscription and policy of heavy taxation gave rise to popular resentment. The dying years of the Napoleonic era witnessed increasing signs of German opposition to the French rule. The substitution of German by French as the official language of the state administration and educational system - also figured prominently in the course of German national awakening. As Kohn puts it: “many German writers and intellectuals discovered nationalism after 1810 or were converted to it by the force of events…” But for some like Fichte, who was “untouched by the prejudices of National interests or the lure of the national past”, the Napoleonic occupation of Berlin in 1806 was in itself a good reason to arouse national sentiment. The experience was decisive in his recognition of the urgent need for building a sovereign German nation, which he defined in purely linguistic terms. The choice of language as the quintessential criterion for national unity was only logical, given the absence of any concrete community of interests amongst the fragmented German states and diverse social groups. Cognizant of this specific character of Germany and motivated by the presence of an occupying power, Fichte outlined his concept of German nationalism in his famous 1806 address:

> To begin with and before all things: the first, original, and truly natural boundaries of states are beyond doubt their internal boundaries. Those who speak the same language are joined to each other by a multitude of invisible bonds by nature herself, long before any human art begins; they understand each other and

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have the power of continuing to make themselves understood more and more clearly; they belong together and are by nature one and an inseparable whole.⁶

The Emergence of German Multi-Class Ethnic Nationalism

Fichte’s nationalist views heralded a new era of German history where the quest for national identity increasingly turned to language. Such an emphasis on a shared language as the distinctive feature of German nationalism had a unifying role in the German confederation, which was fragmented into a multitude of separate political entities. Language as the symbolic representation of a commonly inherited cultural patrimony gave expression to a sense of nationhood that encompassed all those living within its linguistic and geographic boundaries. The belief in the primordial existence of the German nation embodied in the old *Reich* and revitalized by folkloric traditions lay at the core of this linguistically expressed Romantic nationalism.

The emphasis on a common language had yet another important implication for Germany. It set the tone for the multi-class character of German nationalism, an all-inclusive one that spurred diverse social classes to rally around a single ideology. This prevalence of culture over class identity gave expression to a new nationalist paradigm, concurrent with the opinion voiced by the likes of Fichte and Herder that “an awakened and free public opinion strengthened national vitality and did not undermine the authority of the state.”⁷ The quest for the German national identity was not an entirely elite project; it subsumed diverse and even conflicting class interests. In fact, the core of the German nationalist movement during the first half of the nineteenth century consisted largely of disaffected numbers of middle-class and students, who joined hands with other social groups, notably artisans and labourers. Each took an active part in presenting its own sense of the idealized past that seemed congruent with and inspiring to the creation of a united, liberal democratic Germany.⁸

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⁸. Germany was and continued to be a very hierarchical society, but the point I would like to stress here is that the Grimms passed around the “romance” of nationalism.
Romantic sentiment was the initial impetus that led to action. The Wartburg Festival of 18 October 1817 in Burschenschaften was the most spectacular example of this sort. The choice of Wartburg Castle as the rallying point was symbolic. It was the very site where Martin Luther had taken sanctuary centuries earlier and where he had translated the Bible into German. No doubt, there was a nostalgic element inherent in the use of this symbolism around the person of Luther whom the participants praised for his devotion to German language and culture. But they equally hailed him as a national hero for his stance against external oppressors, an attribute informed by contemporary political impulses. Similarly, the introduction of Germany’s national tricolour of black, red, and gold by student fraternities was yet another important form of symbolism, which contained elements from both the past and the present. The insistence by the protesters at the Wartburg Festival of 1817 that the downfall of the Napoleonic rule in Germany was wrought by common folks rather than “the heroic achievement of a monarch” was clearly in tune with the emergence of a popular nationalist sentiment that stood in opposition to the German Confederation.9

This political initiative from below manifested itself in the Hambacher Feast of May 1832. An estimated crowd of 20,000 to 30,000 people carrying banners marched to the ruins of Hambach Castle to express their dissatisfaction with the archaic and autocratic political structure of the autonomous states of the German Confederation.10

The revolutionary upheavals of 1848 shook the German Confederation, adding fuel to the ongoing struggle for a united and democratic Germany. Until then, the nature of German class politics had been characterized by the expressed resentment of the middle-class against the alliance of the feudal corvée and religious orthodoxy. It now

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9. This was further indicated in the publication of a set of ethical principles by national student fraternities (Burschenschaften) in the immediate aftermath of the festival. Therein, they stressed the need “to enlighten fellow citizens about the true nature of the fatherland and the state of public affairs, ‘to purify and strengthen their minds’, and to facilitate an awareness of ‘morality, politics and history’. ” See K.G. Faber, “Göres, Weitzel und die Revolution (1819)”, Historische Zeitschrift 194, no. 1 (February 1962): 37-61, quoted in Hahn, The 1848 Revolutions in German-Speaking Europe, 27.

10. Popular nationalism was inspired by the 1830 revolutionary movement in France. It placed the middle class on a collision course with the conservative order as the marchers demanded “a constitutional monarchy with the constitution allowing for representation, separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, guarantees for human and civil rights (including the freedom of movement, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly), free trade and national unity.” See Beutin, A History of German Literature..., 222.
assumed a revolutionary character with the active presence of the rebellious craftsmen and labourers whose social aspirations and political demands were radically different. This was a turning point in German history in that it changed the balance between Romantic ideology and the Enlightenment political philosophy in favour of the latter. While the use of symbolic elements by the participants prefigured the continued presence of Romanticism, the focus on constitutional issues, equal rights, and social justice by a broad spectrum of political forces concurred with the egalitarian message of the Enlightenment.

Although the 1848 German revolution failed, leading to a renewed phase of political repression, it nonetheless had a significant impact on continental Europe. As Hahn points out, the German political upheavals of the nineteenth century, notably those culminating in 1848 revolutions, constituted “a pivotal force within a wider European struggle for national unity and not merely as a limited constitutional and democratic development.”\textsuperscript{11} The multi-class character of German nationalism was indeed such “a pivotal force” that had a universal appeal to both the working class and the bourgeoisie. While workers and the disfranchised in general hailed the German example for the prospect of political participation it held out, the bourgeoisie and the elite as a whole sought to advance their ideological and cultural priorities by framing them within a national context.

**The Socializing Role of Fairy Tales in the Age of Romanticism**

The series of developments outlined above generated the need for a new wave of fairy tales that no longer dealt with “allegorical representations of evil in the Christian tradition”, but focused on socio-political, historical, and philosophical issues pertaining to Germany. If anything, the evil forces now took on a social character being “symbolically associated with the philistine bourgeois society or the corrupt aristocracy.” Thus, in his allegorical tale, 'Klingsohrs Mütchen', Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg

\textsuperscript{11} Hans Hahn, *The 1848 Revolutions in German-Speaking Europe* (Toronto: Longman, 2001), 53.
or better known as Novalis (1772–1801), poet, author, and philosopher of Early German Romanticism, not only denounced the impeding role of the aristocracy in the development of Germany, but also expressed his desire for a magical transformation of Germany. Others like Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck, Joseph von Eichendorff, Clemens Brentano, Adelbert Chamisso, Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, E. T. A. Hohann, wrote profusely in “defence of the imagination” and social justice as parts of their critique of both the Enlightenment and absolutism.12

This shift of emphasis in the fairy tale was not tantamount to the renouncement of the socializing function of the genre that was in tune with the civilizing process. On the contrary, it corresponded to a new phase in the process where the most pressing issues of nineteenth-century Germany were integrated into a grand socializing scheme. If the earlier generations of fairy tale writers had concerned themselves with reformation of manners and the Protestant ethics, the Romantics raised a whole series of contemporary social and political questions. The shift pinpoints the historical trajectory of Europe in its transformation from the formation of absolutist states to the emergence of modern nation-states, thus heralding a new phase of the civilizing process.

It is at this historical juncture that the Grimms left their mark in popularizing contemporary issues pertaining to the modern nation-state. Not only did their tales act as “linguistic monuments of a common culture”, but they fostered a mode of political socialization that inextricably linked bourgeois ethics and morality to national identity. It was on this account that in his address to a Gymnasium convocation in the 1880s, Eugen Labes boasted that “the Grimms are revered because they revealed the German nation’s true identity to itself.”13 Yet, the Grimms’ cultural project went beyond the national boundary; it helped the continental bourgeoisie in its mission of disseminating the prevailing norms and values to the rest of society. This is precisely what the Grimms as the representatives of German literati contributed to the cultural and ideological foundation of modern Europe. As Zipes observes, in the absence of “actual military

power and unified economic power”, the German bourgeoisie “used its ‘culture’ as a weapon to push through its demands and needs.”

In Germany, such sensibilities emanated from a political philosophy that since the 1720s had been promoting civility, virtue, and individual moral character. At the core of it lay a close affinity between politics and morality, a tradition that in its political and cultural form was inherited by the Brother Grimm and promoted by the German gymnastics associations. As Daniel A. McMillan points out: “Good character made for good citizens, and only good citizens – as distinct from sophisticated organization, a well-crafted constitution, or other components of a political system – could make representative government work well and without conflict.” To this end, members of these literary circles created “elaborate rules” to ensure “polite demeanor and orderly discussion”, often by imposing “an elevated notion of moral conduct”, which was deemed to be “a vital precondition for civil society’s self-government” and for the individual’s “moral improvement”. In this way, the Habermasian public sphere was created which in turn became an agent of social discipline, a framework within which the image of the innocent child was construed.

The German veneration of moral character acquired an added significance amongst leading literary figures like Goethe and Schiller, who vehemently rejected the idea of revolution in favour of gradual change. Reasoning that Germany was far from being politically mature, they opted for a series of middle-class reforms, designed above all to elevate the general ethical standard “to a point where social and political change would occur of their own volition...” To Schiller, such a moral improvement in the individual could only be achieved through “a balance between his sensual and rational natures.” The task of doing so, in Schiller’s opinion, essentially rested with classical

15. For the role of the German gymnastics movement in the construction of a bourgeois national identity in the period between the German revolution of 1848 and the German unification in 1871 see Berit Elisabeth Dencker, “Class and the Construction of the 18th Century German Male Body”, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 15, no. 2 (June, 2002): 220-251.
By the early nineteenth century, moral and ethical values had become the cornerstone of German national identity. The German term Gemütlichkeit that originally meant an emotionally comfortable condition but made synonymous with such modern concepts and traits as “aesthetic sensitivity and a love for order and beauty, idealism, precision and thoroughness, punctuality” became “stereotypically associated with being German.”¹⁸ They were reminiscent of the magic and charm of an exotic past when virtue and natural purity were the norm, echoed for the most part in oral folk tales. This Romantic view of the German past, laden with moral precepts, and visualized through mythical traditions, had its impact on the character of German nationalism, as its ideology increasingly came to be imbued with the concept of folklore. Johann Gottfried von Herder was the main proponent of the idea of recording and preserving Germanic folk songs with a view to establishing the self-contained unity and identity of the German-speaking people. Herder’s advice was followed by other German literary figures who expanded this new mythical concept to an emerging nation. The collection of Des Knaben Wunderhorn (The Boy’s Magic Horn”), a series of folk songs published by Clemens Brentano and Ludwig Achim von Arnim in 1806 was of special importance. It paved the way for a shift of emphasis from “popular poetry” to “the field of Märchen”¹⁹

Not only did the growing popularity of Märchen coincide with a Romantic view suitable to the intellectual propensity of German nationalism but its association with civility, virtue and morality was concomitant with the cultural imperatives of an emerging nation-state. For this reason, a clear distinction was made between the Volksmärchen, the peasant style tale narrative, and the Kunstmärchen, the literary form of retelling the tales, only to stress the importance of refined manners. As Dietz-Rüdiger Moser has observed:

¹⁸. Rebecca S.C. French, "The Devil in Disguise —a Comparative Study of Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus (1947) and Klaus Mann's Mephisto (1936), focussing on the role of art as an allegory of the rise and fall of Nazi Germany", M.A. Thesis submitted to German Studies, School of Languages, Rhodes University, March 2009, 24.
“Märchen are not primitive products of the human intellect, but are instead artistic literary productions of a relatively sophisticated cultural stratum.”

The Grimms’ collection of 86 German fairy tales titled *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (*Children’s and Household Tales*), which first appeared in 1812 (volume one) and 1815 (volume two), was of a similar artistic nature. Although not directly derived from oral folk tales, the *Volk*, as they claimed, it proved to be an effective means of diffusing the dominant culture and ideology. This had to be done first and foremost by the appropriation of the cultural forms of the *volk* and their refinement in accordance with contemporary morality, which meant that the “oppositions between fantastic and didactic literature were far less sustained than has frequently been assumed.”

For this reason, the Grimms had to alter the old tales in such a way as to conform to the cultural and ideological imperatives of German nationalism which had a wide appeal to diverse social classes. This entailed a mixture of the old and new ideas, a masterful literary technique, which they devised at a time when the idea of German unity was threatened by ideological and class divisions. Such a technique greatly enlarged the concept of nation by including in it hitherto excluded social groups, a move that necessitated the extension of the dominant cultural ethos and moral values to the rest of society.

This is what distinguishes the Grimms from their predecessor, notably Charles Perrault. If Perrault’s fairy tales were to disseminate the bourgeois codes of conduct among the aristocratic circles, those of the Grimms went further to spread them beyond the social elite. The latter were in response to the cultural imperatives of German nationalism that overshadowed class differences in a manner that paved the way for bourgeois ideological hegemony. From this perspective, the Grimms’ fairy tales not only helped promote bourgeois ideology, but they also succeeded in creating the mind-set for its universal reception as national identity. In this endeavour, they joined hands with the

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21. The subsequent editions of the two volumes appeared in 1819 and 1857.
22. In reality, only a few of their tales could be classified. For a full discussion of this controversy see John M. Ellis, *One Fairy Story Too Many: The Brothers Grimm and Their Tales* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), 2-7, 37.
bourgeois class which “accepted the possibilities for identification in these texts beyond national boundaries, texts which effectively represent their own virtue and ideals and can be used for pedagogical purposes.”24 What was equally important here was the popular embrace of the moral and cultural sensibilities of the dominant classes. While it certainly helped the elite classes to establish their cultural and ideological predominance, it was also accepted by the socially inferior others as a gateway to upward social mobility.

The above considerations reflect the Grimms’ political ideology that sought to minimize “frictions and points of conflicts”, and legitimizing the norms of “bourgeois society by seemingly granting upward mobility and the possibility of autonomy.”25 Such a mediating role led them to vacillate between political liberalism on the one hand and social conservatism of the sort that resonated with their Christian religious beliefs on the other hand. While the former put them on a collision course with the conservative order, the latter distanced them from radical politics. Hence, their ethics at least in part “assumed the form of a self-validation that was particularly expressed in a validation of patriarchy in the family and male domination in the public realm.” It is no wonder that most of the heroines in the Grimms’ fairy tales are depicted in a rather passive manner so as to suggest that “a woman’s best place is in the house as a diligent, obedient, and self-sacrificing wife.” In contrast, male protagonists are shown to have performed “a socially symbolic act of self-mastery” that gives them the power to subjugate both women and nature.”26

Such a mediating role by the Grimms also resonated with the way in which they related to their sources. While the preoccupation with the resuscitation of a pure German culture led them to expunge foreign motifs from their collected tales,27 at the same time they decked them out with modern features. Hence, the Grimms were not mere collectors of oral folk tales as it is often assumed, but “creative contaminators” who

incorporated “stylistic, formal, and substantial thematic changes” in accordance with the social aspirations of their middle-class audience. In doing so, they advanced an alternative concept of nationhood that not only shared aspects of the contesting nationalist trends but also imbibed both old and new ideas.

The inheritance model of the folktales on which the Grimms’ ideological constellation of a pure German Märchen or a Volksstamm tradition rested was instrumental in the creation of the concept. At the core of it lay the extended concept of “us”, the Germans, which signalled a significant break with its predecessors which were written by – and for – the social groups who dominated the absolutist states and pre-revolutionary French society. The new concept, as Bottigheimer points out, was not limited to the “urban merchant class of the sixteenth-century tale collections.” Rather, it “had become a mythicized and probably mythical agrarian folk, because nineteenth-century German Protestant readers in nationalistic age had been educated to admire and to identify with the man of the soil.”

Consequently, the Grimms’ notion of ‘us’ served to promote the idea of social harmony, to elevate moral and ethical standards, and above all to present the ordinary folks with a projected sense of power over their social and economic conditions. The thematic framework within which this tradition was reconstructed, with tales promising one’s triumph over difficulties by virtue of showing good moral character, had its special effect. It set the tone for a change in the concept of peoples’ sovereignty that came to be perceived as a moral rather than a collective socio-political endeavour. That many of the protagonists in The Children’s and Household Tales are initially men and women of humble origin who at the end of the story acquire a much higher status speaks to the point. The concomitant use of magical elements, miracles, and enchantment is induced to bracket “the time and place of the narrative outside reality”30, thus setting the tone for the boundless freedom of human will. The message, as noted by Zipes is simple: “The

imaginary private adventure becomes an imaginary social venture for power.”31 This redefinition of the concept in light of morality and through magical intervention resonated with the modern notion of personal achievement that was rooted in Enlightenment philosophy. It had important implications, not least because it helped transform fundamental elements of a culture and ideology which were increasingly taking on a novel character.

What is more, in revitalizing past folkloric traditions, the Grimms placed the Romantic view of childhood as “the childhood of mankind” at the very centre of their literary enterprise. This led the Grimms to embark on several revisions of their tales in ways that were appropriate for children. If the content of the old magic tales and novellas prior to the Grimms often called for “the strict exclusion of children”, the stylistic emphasis on the “childlike sense of wonder and the moral simplicity” increasingly shifted the focus to children. Wilhelm Grimm’s statement on the subject was quite apposite: “These stories are pervaded by the same purity that makes children appear so marvellous and blessed to us...”32 Such tactfulness on the part of the two brothers accounts for the German lead in the realm of fairy tales, as seen from the enormous popularity of their collection, specially its 1857 final edition.33 As Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann observes:

The triumphal procession of the Children’s and Household Tales succeeded only because the nurseries of bourgeois homes formed the well-disposed circle of consumers. With its strong bourgeois sense of family the nineteenth century was receptive to the Grimms’ fairy tales as a book that mothers and grand-mothers could read aloud and that children could read to themselves... The possibilities for identification involved nationalist thought and German Volkstümlichkeit, and all of this was considered to be perfectly captured in the Grimms’ Children’s and

32. Dégh, Grimm’s Household Tales and Its Place in the Household..., 92.
Household Tales. The success of their book cannot be understood without studying the social history of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{34}

Still, the success of the Grimms’ collection can be attributed to its wide appeal for a universally shared bourgeois culture that based itself on social harmony at the time when much of Europe witnessed enhanced class polarization. This stemmed from the Grimms’ continental posture that fitted the universal and migratory models of their folktale collection. Each model in its own specific way gave expression to a polygenetic view of human culture: the former by laying emphasis on the basic common aspects of human thoughts and cultural traits, and the latter by showing the territorial transmission of the cultural motifs. Thus, as Heinz Rölleke, a leading scholar of the Grimms’ fairy tales, points out:

...it was not the joy about the ‘German essence’ of the tales that brought about the international success of the \textit{Children’s and Household Tales} as a book but much more the respective affinity between the social and cultural givens in a particular country with those of Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{35}

Rölleke’s remark leads us to pose a historically relevant question: Was the Grimms’ exploration into the past for pure German identity not an indigenous response to the historical pressure exercised in the age of bourgeois supremacy? The answer would be in the affirmative as I argue that much of what the German Romantic writers, including the Brother Grimms, presumed to be of German origin was in fact influenced by contemporary social and political impulses. After all, in nineteenth-century Germany, “[t]he historical logic of traditions and custom was no longer sufficient: \textit{viability} and \textit{efficiency} now asserted themselves as the norms of economic activity.”\textsuperscript{36} The liberal


\textsuperscript{36} Quoted in Beutin, \textit{A History of German Literature}..., 224.
political philosophy, the spirit of capitalist entrepreneurship, the civilizing process, and Christian morality were the driving forces that had a significant appeal to the hegemonic aspirations of the German middle-class. All these were important components of a grand socialization scheme which was to shape the future generation of the German people, beginning with young children. To this end, the Grimms, like “all the Romantics sought to contain, comprehend, and comment on the essence of the changing times in and through the fairy tale…”37

This instrumental use of fairy tales as a medium of socialization may explain why there has been a significant shift of emphasis in Children and Household Tales since its first appearance in 1812. Clearly, the Grimms’ fairy tales in their original version were not intended for children, not only because of technical reasons such as detailed references and lack of illustrations, but also because of frequent allusions to sex, incest, and violence. To make them suitable for children, the Grimms found it necessary to purge the sexual contents from the story line as the first step in reconfiguring their tales in accordance with contemporary socialization paradigm. While in the earlier editions, “sex and violence”. often in “the perverse form of incest and child abuse”, constituted “the major thematic concerns” of their tales, “over the years he [Wilhelm Grimm] systematically purged the collection of references to sexuality and masked depictions of incestuous desire.”

Yet despite such attempts to expunge the original tales of references to sexual contents, illicit or incestuous, as Maria Tatar accounts, “lurid portrayals of child abuse, starvation, and exposure, like fastidious descriptions of cruel punishments, on the whole escaped censorship.” The trend echoes the Grimms’ own cultural preferences, informed and guided by nineteenth-century cultural values, which “seem to have favoured violence over whimsy.” In fact, they did not hesitate to include “detailed descriptions of children abused and of abusers punished; nor did they rush to excise passages that showed heads rolling or fingers flying through the air.”38

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38. Tatar, The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales, 10-11, 6-7, 20,
The continued presence of violence in the later editions of the Grimms’ collection denotes the social function of violence. If the elimination of the passages with sexual connotations aimed at safeguarding childhood innocence, the retention of violence was intended to warn children of the consequences of their improper acts. Wilhelm Grimm’s editorial changes were geared toward this objective. As Tatar rightly observes, Wilhelm Grimm’s purging of references to the subject of pregnancy in the subsequent editions of “Hans Dumm” and “The Master Hunter” was in keeping with the conventional morality of his time that did not approve of any direct mention of sexual matters. Likewise, the more detailed account of violence in the second edition of “The Cudgel in the Sack” as compared to its earlier edition was marshalled in the service of morality. Whereas in the first edition the use of physical violence is intended as a forcible act to restore one’s lost property, in the second edition it appears as an institutionalized form of punishment with a deterring effect on the mind of the wrongdoer.39

Other editorial changes made by Wilhelm Grimm were equally in the service of morality, functioning primarily as a legitimizing modern patriarchy and its sexual division of labour. Here again, the image of the Romantic child was feminized to define and delineate women’s social and biological roles in accordance with the moral and ideological dictates of the Christian/bourgeois order. Zipes’ comparison of the 1810 manuscript of “The Frog Prince” with its 1812 and 1857 editions illustrates the point. While in its original manuscript, the physical surroundings of the story are “simple and totally lacking in frills”, in its printed versions the setting is perceptibly ornamented with symbols of material luxuries. Zipes maintains that this change of setting “did not occur merely for stylistic reasons”, rather it “provides an identification basis for a bourgeois child”40 [the king’s daughter] who is “unique, somewhat spoiled, and very wealthy.” She is predisposed to think “in terms of monetary payment and basically treats the frog as though he were a member of a lower caste – an attitude not apparent in the original version.” As such, the “ornate description”, he further notes, is to “cover or eliminate the
sexual frankness of the original tale”, because in its true form sex was seen as repulsive. Thus, “like all good bourgeois children”, the young princess “rejects the sexual advances of the frog, a moral determination for which she is rewarded at the end.”

More examples of such editorial changes were Wilhelm Grimm’s additions of “numerous Christian expressions and references” in order to emphasize “specific role models for male and female protagonists according to the dominant patriarchal code of that time.” One such example was a subtle variation in the story of “Rapunzel”, which aimed at purging allusions to explicit sexual contents. In its 1812 edition, Rapaunzel’s inadvertent disclosure of her secret love to the old fairy involves a revelation of her pregnancy, as she asks: “Tell me, Mother Gothel, why do you think my clothes have become too tight for me and no longer fit.” In the 1857 edition, the reference to Rapaunzel’s love relationship with the young prince and her pregnancy is almost absent, as she blurts out: “Mother Gothel, how is it that you’re much heavier than the prince? When I pull him up, he’s is here in a second.”

The 1812 edition of “Snow White” as distinct from its 1810 Ölenberg manuscript serves yet another purpose. The editorial changes made here essentially consisted of newly added words which, as already stated, were intended to accentuate female duties in a modern patriarchal system. Thus, in the original manuscript when Snow Whites finds herself at the dwarfs’ dwelling, all she is asked to do as a condition to stay there is to fulfil their demands, i.e., “to do the cooking for them.” In the 1812 edition, this demand expands to include other tasks, as the dwarfs said: “If you keep the house for us and cook, sew, make the beds, wash and knit, and keep everything tidy and clean, you may stay with us...”

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42. Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm...,* 34.
The Child as Both Passive and Active Audience in the Grimms’ Fairy Tales

If the need to preserve childhood innocence was a factor in shifting the Grimms’ focus to children, having them involved in the building of the nation-state was yet another. While the former was associated with femininity, the latter signified masculinity, representing the private and the public spheres respectively. Both had their impact on the Grimms’ concept of childhood, which was of a dual and complex nature. These are the themes which I shall pursue in the remaining part of the present chapter. To do so, it is important to view the Grimms’ tales in their entirety. Rather than treating each story on its own, I look at the collection historically, by reading them as interrelated social and political issues of nineteenth century German society. Only in this way can one grasp the full implications of their fairy tales for Germany and beyond. This does not necessarily mean examining every single tale, which is neither practical nor necessary. Instead, I will concentrate on some of the most popular tales in Children’s and Household Tales, preferably its 1857 edition that best represents the impact of the times on shaping German culture and national identity.

I begin with an analogy. In almost every story in the literary tradition of the Mirror for Princes, it is often the sovereign whom the narrator addresses, urging him to follow certain moral principles and policies in running his affairs. The ancient Indian text of Panchatantra, John of Salisbury’s Politicaticus (1159), and the Renaissance text of The Prince by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) are prominent examples of this tradition. The Grimms’ Children’s and Household Tales is of a similar nature, except that here children have been substituted for the sovereign, a change in the nature of the audience which is itself indicative of the age of modern-nation state. Like the sovereign, children are instructed to behave in a certain manner, while at the same time being socialized into acting as an active force behind social change. This alone has a significant bearing on the Grimms’ concept of childhood, for the child is as much a subject of discipline as s/he is an agent of change. Yet, the two interact in a way that denies neither its innocence nor its agency. This dual perception of the child renders the Grimms’ concept of childhood a radical tone, especially as the child of poverty enters the social arena.
The Romantic image of the child is in some fashion a precursor of the Victorian view of childhood, which is closely associated with innocence and purity. As such, it is a cultural emblem of the era that set new moral and cultural standards for adults, just as it paved the way for the adult construction of the child’s world, a world devoid of sexuality. From this perspective, childhood functioned as a discourse not only for disciplining children, but also for what Deborah Thacker calls “the silencing of the ‘other’”. It targeted women, the underclass, and the social outcast, who were all expected to act in accordance with the dictates of a predominantly adult/male elite culture. Like children they too, came under constant surveillance, lest they indulge in types of behaviour that would divest the nation of its cultural purity.

What is more, the child’s image as a symbol of purity was increasingly feminized in the Grimms’ fairy tales, with a view to regulating female sexual conduct as well as sexualizing any type of behaviour deemed inappropriate. This is evident from the narrative structure of the stories that depicts the female protagonist as “passive, obedient, self-sacrificing, hard-working, patient, and straight-laced”, qualities which became the defining features of modern patriarchy. Characteristically, the Grimms’ heroine fits the feminized image of the Romantic child, who is confined to the private sphere and is in need of male protection.

If the Grimms’ fairy tales proved to be restrictive of women’s social space, it gave representation to children of poverty, who had hitherto remained outside the grand socializing scheme of the nation-state. The latter was part of a general trend towards greater social integration that socialized them into becoming morally sensible and obedient citizens, into believing that “the only way to acquire wealth and power is through diligence, perseverance, and honesty.” This extension of the bourgeois universe to the bulk of the underclass through the socializing effect of fairy tales may be discerned from a simple observation that many of the main protagonists in the Grimms’ stories are lower-class figures who evince quintessentially bourgeois attributes. Here, the

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popular reception of the dominant culture and ideology is closely tied to the promise of upward social mobility. As Zipes points out: “The succession to power of lower-class figures is legitimized by their essential qualities of industriousness, cleverness, opportunism, and frankness.” This constitutes “a communicative action that enables the protagonist to seize the possibility to right a wrong.”

This is where the masculine version of the child’s image (which is representative of the public sphere) asserts itself. Such interplay of the child of Romanticism with the child of poverty had a radical implication, seen for the most part in the recognition of childhood agency. His/her exposure to the harsh realities of the outside world, reminiscent of the medieval child, is precisely what enables the child of poverty to assume a leading agential role. But while s/he shares characteristics with the child of Romanticism, s/he at the same time borrows the latter’s innocence. This accounts for the Grimms’ dual view of childhood that on the one hand allows for its agency, but on the other retains its innocence.

“Hansel and Gretel” and the Grimms’ Dual conception of Childhood

The story of “Hansel and Gretel” illustrates this duality of childhood. To be sure, it is the story of “child abandonment, neglect and infanticide”, but it also combines “a scene of passive suffering and unjust persecution” with “a triumphal tale of self-liberation, and self-assertion.” It all begins at the moment when their forced exposure to the outside world places them on the path to maturity. Here, childhood agency manifests itself in the successful actions of two seemingly powerless children struggling to survive in a harsh environment. For, if agency consists in the ability to influence the course of events, the premeditated action by Hänsel and Gretel to protect themselves against perceived dangers was surely of that order.

Orality is of particular importance in this regard, for it did not require biological maturity to access knowledge. Rather, it recalled a culture, which, in contrast

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to that of print, favoured the mixing of the ages, and with it, the unrestricted flow of information. Upon overhearing his father and stepmother plotting to abandon him and his sister Gretel in the forest, Hänsel comes up with a return plan. The next morning, while being taken to the forest, he drops pebbles in their wake, which helps them find their way back home. The shining moon as a symbolic representation of knowledge is another important factor that helps them find their way. As the story goes: “when the full moon had risen, Hänsel took his little sister by the hand, and followed the pebbles which shone like newly-coined silver pieces, and showed the way.”

Equally spectacular is Hänsel’s and Gretel’s ability to escape imminent death at the hands of the witch. When the witch grows impatient and decides to devour Hänsel, the latter succeeds in postponing the terrible death that awaits him by tricking her into believing that he had not grown fat enough to be consumed. He would show her “a little bone “instead of his finger while being kept in the stable so as to convince her that he had not gained weight. In a similar fashion, Gretel saves both herself and her brother by using a trick, pushing the witch deep into the burning oven, where she perishes.

Interpreting the moral of the story, Maria Tatar points out its therapeutic/empowering aspects, thus arguing: “In showing that children can use their wits to defeat the monsters that bedevil them, it gives us a story that empowers children and helps them work through anxieties about abandonment and aggression…”

Certainly, the story does empower children as it places great emphasis on children’s ingenuity and self-reliance, but such qualities are tacitly attributed to children of poverty whose life experiences force them to act accordingly. Both Hänsel and Gretel are thrown out of their home because of abject poverty, being forced to serve the old witch whose “special attire, possessions, and knowledge” recall privilege. The experience brings about their forced maturation that occurs when the two abandoned children, overcome by hunger, eat from the bread, cake, and sugar that went into the building of the witch’s

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48 Grimms, *Grimm’s Household Tales*, vol.1, 60-61.
49 Grimms, *Grimm’s Household Tales*, vol.1, 67-68.
51 Freudenburg, “Illustrating Childhood …”, 302.
house. The consumption of such forbidden items is symbolic of the loss of childhood innocence and entry into adulthood, a journey that had begun as soon as they were abandoned in the wilderness. This entailed discarding childish characteristics and adopting adult qualities in order to survive in a harsh environment, defined, not so much by “the children’s isolation and vulnerability”, as by “the witch’s hunger” and “gluttony”.  

Acting maturely like adults does not necessarily licence children to discard their innocence. Both Hänsel and Gretel are punished for casting aside their innocence when they eat freely from the forbidden foods. They endure a period of suffering at the hands of the witch to the point of facing death, until saved again by their ingenuity and cleverness. Nor does forced maturation exempt children from succumbing to the cultural and moral dictates of the adult world. The point is made evident in the concluding part of the story when the two abandoned children reunite with their father, even though he was actively involved in their entire travail.

It is only logical for the Grimms to disapprove of anything that would undermine childhood innocence. Their denunciation of child labour is an example which is evident in the witch’s exploitation of the two abandoned children. Morality apart, such a practice would contravene their view of childhood, which valued as much its agency as it celebrated its unique characteristics. To be sure, the Grimms were favourably disposed to entrusting children with responsibilities, but they did not deem child labour an option. It was precisely the experience of being a labouring child that would take away childhood innocence. The innocent agent is what the Grimms probably pictured in their mind when they advanced their notion of childhood agency.

This is where the Grimms vigorously dismiss child labour as a social malaise which is not only exploitative, but also supresses the free expression of childlike characteristics. The story of “Thumbling” presents all the characteristics of a child labourer who is used and exploited for the financial gains of adults. Thumbling is sold

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53. This is another aspect of the moral of the story that points out respect for parental authority, regardless of how they treat their children.
by his poverty-stricken - but reluctant - father to two strangers who thought that “the little fellow would make our fortune if we exhibited him in a large town, for money. We will buy him.”54 He is a child of unusually small size who can be kept in the ear of a horse, in a hat, in the mouth of a cow, or in the belly of a wolf, and yet this unconceivably small creature stands out as the representative of tiny little children who were forced into child labour. He is a rebel who warns other similar children of the danger of being exposed to conditions of child labour. He tells how children by virtue of their miniscule size are turned into a source of revenue by profit-seeking adults whom he describes as being comparable to thieves. Thumbling also speaks out against the unfavourable conditions under which children had to work. His experience of hiding in a mouse hole following his escape from the two strangers is reminiscent of the conditions inside a chimney to which many children were exposed. “It is so dangerous to walk on the ground in the dark,” he exclaimed, “how easily a neck or leg is broken.”55

What Thumbling recounts is a public outcry against the entire practice of child labour which is economically exploitative, physically dangerous, and emotionally restraining. Here, the Grimms’ inclination to act as both writers and reformers is apparent. “Thumbling” like other literary works such as Charles Kingsley’s *Water-Babies* in 1863 acts as a moral pressure on many European policy makers to regulate and ultimately abolish child labour.56

There is certainly a fine balance between the two aspects of the Grimms’ model of childhood as it equally gives currency to the child’s self-reliance/ingenuity, qualities which are extended to all children regardless of their social station. This is another area where the Grimms’ fairy tales can be distinguished from those of Perrault, whose prime objective was, first and foremost, to produce well-mannered and obedient citizens. The

55. Grimms, *Grimm’s Household Tales…*, vol. 1, 155.
56. The call for reform was particularly effective in England. In 1864 Lord Shaftesbury passed “The Chimney Sweepers Regulation Act, c37”, in the British parliament, which unlike previous bills went so far as to authorize police to enforce fine and imprisonment for any master sweeps who would violate the law. See K.H. Strange, *Climbing Boys: A Study of Sweeps’ Apprentices 1772-1875* (London: Allison & Busby, 1982), 79. Similarly, in 1875 following the death of George Brewster, a twelve-year-old chimney boy, again on the initiative of Lord Shaftesbury another bill was passed in the British parliament that ended the practice of sending boys up chimney altogether. See Strange, *Climbing Boys…*, 531, 38, 56, 80.
point is well stated in the Grimms’ critical view of parental overprotection, a tendency more prevalent among the affluent families. The story of “the Young Giant” is precisely written with a view to warning parents of this pernicious tendency. A son born to overly protective parents remains “as big as a thumb”, because he is never given a chance to grow up, always preventing him from doing any activity on his own. The father’s refusal to take his son out with him is self-explanatory: “Thou wouldst go out with me? Stay here, thou wilt be of no use out there, besides thou might get lost!” 57 Things however changed when one day a giant carries the boy away to his home. As the giant nurtures and raises the Thumbling, he grows “tall and strong in the manner of giants”, until he could tear up “the strongest oak-tree from the earth...”. The Thumbling’s physical growth is indicative of his maturation, a process which had been thwarted by his overly protective parents. It is no wonder then that when he returns home the father does not recognize him, saying: “No, no, thou art not my son, and thou canst not plough – go away!” 58 This parental mind-set that somewhat unconsciously prevents the child from growing up corresponds to what Buckminster Fuller has pointed out: “Every child is born a genius, but is swiftly degeniused by unwitting humans and/or physically unfavorable environmental factors.” 59

It is in recognition of this belief that the Grimms go so far as to prescribe punishment for bad parenting, as for example in the tale of “St. Joseph in the Forest”. A daughter and her mother both are stung to death by venomous reptile: the daughter for being inconceivably wicked and selfish, and the mother for improperly raising her offspring. The mother is a typical overindulging parent who has spoiled her eldest daughter by constantly succumbing to her wishes, while neglecting completely the youngest despite being virtuous and self-sacrificing. 60 This contradictory approach to raising children is perhaps suggestive of the view that parental neglect and overprotection are essentially one and the same thing; they both would have an adverse effect on children’s intellectual growth and self-reliance.

The Child as the Agent of Change

If the image of the innocent child as a symbol of cultural purity pressured the child to excel in moral and cultural endeavours, the need to build a modern industrialized nation entrusted him/her with agency. S/he was was socialized into aspiring change in both spiritual and material culture, while at the same time acting as the conduit through whom the change was to be communicated and institutionalized. Hence, the Grimms’ fairy tales functioned as a voice for change in a tumultuous Germany, which was the locus of an old aristocracy on the one hand, and the scene of revolutionary upheavals on the other.

The change often necessitated the use of old motifs and symbols from folk tales as a means of reconciling the past with the present. The strategy well suited the Grimms, who were neither “traditional” nor “modern” in the actual sense, but rather a blend of the two perspectives. Their attitude towards women is a case in point. Although women are actively present in the Grimms’ storyline, their feminine persona is silenced and their role confined to the domestic sphere. There is certainly a conscious attempt to set limits on what women’s social roles ought to be simply by objectifying their sexuality and regulating their conducts, as did Perrault before them.

But this was part and parcel of modernity that had made the male elite conscious of women’s social presence, lest it unsettle the social hierarchy. There was nothing new in the Grimms’ perception of women as rationally and intellectually inferior, since the Judo-Christian and the Roman laws, including the Greek philosophical traditions, had denied women legal, political, and economic rights. What was new was the deployment of modern discourses to accentuate the social system of patriarchy at the time when it faced challenges. A remarkable example was the growing male hostility towards female presence in art and literature throughout the modern period which greatly hindered women’s upward mobility.

In view of the above we can understand why until the sixteenth century the exponents of patriarchy made no conscious effort to remind women of their assigned gender role, not because it did not exist but because it was the accepted norm. In this respect, Strarparola’s fairy tales are representative, for the obvious reason that the subject of gender differentiation is almost non-existent in them. It took nearly a century and a
half for subsequent male writers to incorporate the subject into their storylines as they enshrouded it in a new set of discourses. This can be seen in the Grimms’s emphasis on certain features of modern society which are induced in defence of the old patriarchal system. Some instances of this new trend are cited below.

**Social Division of Labour**

This is a distinctly modern concept that celebrates knowledge and expertise, but is framed within a patriarchal system, as the roles assigned to individuals are primarily gender-specific. This is also an area where the tension between modernity and tradition in the Grimms’ ideological constellation becomes apparent. One such example is the 1842 edition of “Snow White”, to which we already referred. Another example with strong allegorical connotations is the story of “The Mouse, the Bird, and the Sausage” which I shall now discuss.

The three characters live together happily, with the bird flying everyday into the forest to fetch wood, the mouse carrying water and lighting the fire, and the sausage cooking food. The trouble starts when the bird passes on his duty to the sausage and takes on the mouse’s function, with the mouse assuming the cook’s role. The result is tragic: the elegant and effeminate sausage is consumed by a ferocious dog as she goes out of home in search of wood. Likewise, the mouse which is characteristically a maid, a menial, is not suitable as a cook. When she attempts “to get into the pot as the sausage used to do, roll and creep amongst the vegetables to mix them”, she loses “her skin and hair and life in the attempt.” As for the wood-fetching bird, masculine in his carefree and fearless work, he is equally ill suited to perform even the most basic household chores. In an attempt to extinguish a fire caused by his own carelessness, “the bird hastened to fetch water, then the bucket dropped from his claws into the well, and he fell down with it, and could not recover himself, but had to drown there.” Here, the idea of modern patriarchy manifests itself and defines roles in accordance with one’s gendered identity. Thus, the most suitable jobs for the mouse and the sausage are household duties, given their feminine personae and vulnerability outside, while for the masculine bird, the job is located outside home.
The Grimms’ accentuation of gender roles is also evident in the story of “King Thrushbeard”. Here, an arrogant princess is forced to perform domestic chores upon her marriage to a fiddler who is in reality King Thrushbeard. Upon failing in all the assigned duties, she is then asked to use her feminine charm to “sit in the market-place and sell the wares.” This is the area where she succeeds, “for the people were glad to buy the woman’s wares because she was good-looking, and they paid her what she asked…”

Hence, women’s gendered identity determines the nature of their work and ultimately their inferior position in society. Perhaps, the only way for the heroines of the Grimms’ fairy tales to be empowered is to suppress their sexuality through piety and obedience. “The Girl Without Hands” is one such story that makes the connection between power and piety. A poverty-stricken miller unwittingly commits himself to giving away his daughter to the devil in exchange for the riches that the latter provides him. It is no doubt a rise tale in which the daughter ultimately acquires royal status by marrying a young king. But what makes such a marriage possible is no longer magic; rather it is her pious and virtuous character along with her feminine charm that has a mesmerising effect on the king. When the time comes for the devil to fetch the girl, he cannot even approach her, and protests angrily to the miller: “Take all water away from her, that she may no longer be able to wash herself, for otherwise I have no power over her.”61 Here, water is a symbol of purity and of power attributable to God. When the devil returns for the girl, her tears fall on her hands and make them pure, and the devil orders the father to cut them off with his own hands. The daughter’s acceptance in an effort to save her father from the devil adds another dimension to her good moral character. Her subservience to the father pays off at the end, as her hands grow back through supernatural intervention. Nonetheless, the power derived from virtue and piety does not entitle her to equality with the male members of the royal household, for she remains secluded in her feminine world, playing the role of a wife and a mother.

The story of “Sweetheart Roland” is another example of how gender roles and morality in women coincide. A maiden escapes with her lover, Roland, from her

61. Grimms, Grimm’s Household Tales, vol. 1, 104, 205, 128.
stepmother who is bent on killing her. It is the beginning of a long journey so full of
dangers and difficulties that at one point the two lovers are forced to part. When Ronald
fails to return after going to his father to arrange their wedding, the maiden changes
herself into a flower; but a shepherd “saw the flower, and as it was so pretty, plucked it,
took it with him, and laid it away in his chest.” Once in the shepherd’s home, the roles
assumed by the flower are predominantly feminine:

When he [the shepherd] arose in the morning, all the work was already done, the
room was swept, the table and benches cleaned, the fire on the hearth was lighted,
and the water was fetched, and at noon, when he came home, the table was laid,
and a good dinner served.62

The flower performs all these duties despite the absence of any relation to the
shepherd or intention to marry him. But she does perform them regardless, because
society obliges her to do so. When the maiden regains her human shape, the shepherd
asks “if she would marry him.” She refuses outright; yet she promises “not to go away,
but to keep house for the shepherd for the future.” Her refusal to marry the shepherd is
primarily due to her desire “to remain faithful to her sweetheart Ronald, although he had
deserted her”, and was about to celebrate his wedding with a new bride.63 The message
is clear: not only are women to serve men, but they also ought to remain faithful to them
even if men are not.

There was certainly continuity in the ways in which women were portrayed by
the Grimms, but there was also a considerable break with the past. Although the Grimms
embraced traditional values, they did not necessarily view them as eternal. This is where
the tension between tradition and modernity is somewhat resolved in favour of the latter.
Like the rest of the Romantics, the Grimms were reformists “who sought a progressive
transformation of modes of living, thinking, and political system”. In so doing, they
linked “the struggle to conceive ‘a golden age’, another world” with the struggle “to gain

63. Grimms, Grimm’s Household Tales, vol. 1, 226.
perspective for change.”⁶⁴ This concurs with Habermas’ perception of the ‘new idealized age’, which though finding a common focus in “the idealized Middle Ages …it did not remain a fixed ideal.” As he points out: “In the course of the nineteenth century this Romanticism produced a radicalized consciousness of modernity that detached itself from all previous historical connection and understood itself in abstract opposition to tradition and history as a whole.”⁶⁵

What, then, the Grimms ended up doing was to revamp an entire world from its social attitudes to morality through the proper function of the state. In the process, they turned more critical of the negative implications of the past cultural traditions, a tendency that manifests itself in their attitude towards some of the most pressing cultural and moral issues. This is especially true of the 1857 edition of Children’s and Household Tales where the impact of new social impulses on their traditional views is greater. Such an impact, as Zipes points out, prompted them to “transcend the conservative notions of both the nobility and bourgeoisie”, thus articulating in a more familiar language “the needs and tastes of a bourgeois avant-garde critical both of the archaic nature of feudal societies and of the utilitarian rationalism of the emerging bourgeoisie.”⁶⁶

This is where the Grimms went along with the pace of the civilizing process as they imbibed new features of modernity. The move was concurrent with their own ideological predilection, which was as much inspired by the Enlightenment political philosophy as it was shaped by Romanticism. Culture was of prime importance here, for if nature predisposed women to assume feminine roles, modern culture enabled them to play roles traditionally assigned to men. Here, the social division of labour is defined not so much on the basis of nature alone as by its association with culture.

The story of “The Twelve Huntsmen”, is exemplary. A young king abandons his betrothed in favour of another to fulfil his late father’s wish. Like many of the Grimms’ fairy tales, the story ends with the young king eventually uniting with his first

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⁶⁵ Habermas, “Modernity…” 39. (emphasis in original)
betrothed. The story is interesting in that the desolate maiden is capable of playing a principally masculine role in an attempt to draw the attention of the young king. She, along with eleven girls of exact resemblance appears in the King’s court as huntsmen, walking as firmly as men, and supressing “their natural propensity to engage in feminine roles. In doing so, they defy the prevailing conservative order symbolized in the King’s Lion who urges the King to put them to test as he cast doubt on their masculinity.

But whereas the lion’s proposed tests fail to disclose the true identity of the maiden, her emotional reaction unveils the secret. When the King’s former betrothed learns that the bride is about to appear in the court, she becomes so emotional that she faints falling to the ground. This is a crucial moment in the story as the maiden’s emotional outburst inadvertently reveals her true feminine identity to the king.67

The story’s concluding remarks are of historical significance. They are consistent with what Dorothée Sturkenboom calls “the phenomenon of emotionalism”, projected “most exclusively onto women’s body”, and “equated with womanhood.”68 Although asserted since antiquity, it was in the seventeenth century that, as Denise Riley points out, it appeared in the scientific discourses of modernity, notably in the medical and physiological conception of womanhood, which all but marked the end of the Aristotelian view of woman. Woman, though “thought to be equally perfect in her sex, she does not seem to achieve complete parity with man, or does so only at the expense of considerable dislocation in medical thought.”69 On the contrary, woman’s “physiology “physiology and humours seem to destine her to be the inferior of man, both physically and mentally.”70 This was even true of the Dutch journalist and encyclopaedist, Egbert Buys, who despite praising “women for their patience and their loving and merciful inclinations, could not have suspected that this idea would …become the nucleus of a

69. Riley, Am I That Name?, 23.
new sex/gender paradigm…” Thus, in his 1748 sympathetic view of women he declared:

It is true that Women's passions are in general far stronger than those of Men; this is why their wrath, hatred, vengefulness, unchastity, pride and other impulses far exceed those of Men: but it is equally certain that where their inclinations are for the good, they surpass Men in their qualities of patience, love, mercy, chastity, humility and endurance.

The emotional woman was thus subordinated to the rational man, a new criterion for the sexual division of labour that had hitherto been justified in purely biological terms. The prevailing view in the age of Enlightenment was now reflected in the Grimms’ shift of emphasis from biological determinism to culture and to emotionalism in gender roles. In this respect, the story of “The Twelve Huntsmen” is no aberration in the Grimms’ cultural universe; it was a subtle way of drawing the same conclusion about the sexual division of labour. In “The Eve’s Various Children”, such primeval division of labour is perceived as inherently natural. It begins with the banishment of Adam and Eve from paradise, whereupon “they were compelled to build a house for themselves on fruitful ground, and eat their bread in the sweat of their brow.” The story no doubt accentuates the importance of human activity in the worldliest affair of subsistence, yet the role assigned to each individual in carrying out this activity is from the very outset gendered: “Adam dug up the land, and Eve span.”

“The Twelve Huntsmen” reveals the modern interplay of culture and nature, tempered by women’s sentimentalism. Here, it is not culture but women’s’ inherent emotional weakness’ that prevents them from performing masculine roles. This sexual division of labour is a characteristic feature of modern patriarchy, since, prior to 1500, to quote Bottigheimer, “sex, sexuality, and social relations as they were portrayed in tale

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71. Quoted in Sturkenboom, “Historicizing the Gender of Emotions…”, 69.
72. De Algemeene Spectator, 3 July 1748, 33, quoted in Sturkenboom, “Historicizing the Gender of Emotions…”, 56.
collections had little to do with familiar gender roles.” It was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that “modern attributions of femininity took firm shape and led to the construct of femininity” and “the gender polarization that has become familiar in modern fairy tales.” It is therefore not surprising that “they manifest qualities opposite to modern ones.”

This is certainly true in so far as we expect modern fairy tales to echo the emancipatory message of modernity. However, engendered by modern technologies of power, modernity accentuated such new forms of social differentiation as gender, class, ethnicity and race. The paradox is evident in many of the Grimms’ fairy tales as for example the tale of “Wise Folk” that uses the naivety of a peasant woman not only as a distinctive feature of oral popular culture but also as evidence for women’s social and intellectual inferiority. Her simplicity in business dealing is characteristically indicative of the artlessness of the pre-modern era that prompts the husband to say: “you are the stupidest goose that ever walked on God’s earth. You have a perfect talent for folly.”

Morality, Ethics, and Social Justice in the Grimms’ Fairy Tales
The issues surrounding female sexuality constitute an important component of the Grimms’ moral edifice, but equally important is their perspectives on a number of related issues. Here, I focus on the later with a view to pinpointing how even in the areas of sexuality, ethics and justice the Grimms deviated from conventional morality. I do so by looking at the tales of “The Faithful John”, “Our Lady’s Child” and “Rapunzel” which though framed within a patriarchal system, contain elements that point to the opposite direction.

The first story pertains to the pursuit of curiosity and desire which though forbidden and punishable, are not as serious a transgression for men as they are for women. Contrary to his late father’s injunction, a young King gains access to the chamber where the portrait of the princess of the Golden Dwelling is stored. This was

76. Grimms, Grimm’s Household Tales..., Vol. 2, 75.
the moment the father had feared most, for once the son caught a glimpse of her portrait, he fell “violently in love with her”, and dropped “down in a swoon”, and went “through great danger for her sake…”

The dangers were an obstacle but the besotted young king detects and deflects them, thanks to the ingenuity of his royal servant, the faithful John. No punishment awaits the king. Yet he entices the princess and spirits her away to his kingdom. It seems as if the king’s riches and grandeur compensate for the moral offence of abducting a young woman. As for the princess, the king’s intention of marrying her is in itself reason to change her heart, return his love, and willingly accompany him to his kingdom.

Such moral laxity with respect to sexual matters is not extended to female protagonists. In fact, the punishment reserved for them would be harsh. The story of “Our Lady’s Child” is an interesting example that stipulates punishment for female sexual curiosity. A poverty-stricken couple places their three-year old daughter under the care of the Virgin Mary. The girl is fed and well-treated by her custodian until age fourteen when she brings misery on herself by flouting instructions not to open the last (thirteenth) door. The opening of the forbidden door is a metaphor for puberty and the loss of innocence, a punishable act for which the girl is expelled from Heaven into the wilderness. While in the wilderness the girl meets a young prince, who becomes infatuated with her beauty and takes her as his wife. Yet her past continues to haunt the young queen. Each time she gives birth to a child, the Virgin Mary appears, urging her to repent her transgression in order to keep the child. The queen’s refusal to admit any wrongdoing is paid for by her new-borns. They are instantly carried off by the diligent Virgin Mary, who simultaneously deprives the queen of her power of speech by simply tying her tongue. The punishment is executed twice, because the queen is deemed an unfit mother. It is only when the queen confesses her sin to the Virgin Mary and repents at her third childbirth that she is forgiven, all her children are restored to her, and her tongue is untied.

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That the child protagonist in the story is female is no coincidence, since children and women are the locus of repressed sexuality. Any indulgence on the part of the child/female character in premature or illicit sex or even sexual fantasy is not only shameful, but also punishable. This is the conveyed message that the young reader is presented with, but it is not the entire moral of the story. There is certainly a divergence from the conventional view of female sexuality which is projected by the young queen. By refusing to “admit wrong-doing”, she is actually making it known to the Virgin Mary that sexuality is all normal and that she is being punished for pride. Even when she confesses her sin she is penitent because, as St. Paul said so famously: “It is better to marry that burn with passion”, since the Christian marriage was the only proper venue for sexual relations, and that the purpose of such relations was procreation. Hence, the moral of the story is: “He who repents his sin and acknowledges it, is forgiven.” After all, repentance as a moral awakening promises a reformed conscience that exudes the interplay of the morality of the Christian religion and the legality of the secular state. Both are components of a socialization paradigm that seeks to strengthen the moral and cultural foundations of an emerging nation, which is as nostalgic about its golden past as it is driven by the rules of the modern nation-state.

The tale of “Rapunzel” is another example that departs from the conventional view of morality as regards the social attitude to female sexuality. Rapunzel has been placed under the charge of an enchantress since infancy because her father had collected rampions for his pregnant wife from the enchantress’s garden. At the age of twelve, the enchantress shuts her in a tower with no doors and stairs where she remained completely cut off from the outside world. Rapunzel’s only contact is with the enchantress herself who visits her from time to time by entering through the top window, using Rapunzel’s long braided tresses to climb up.

Being the voice of conventional wisdom, the enchantress seeks to repress female sexuality in its most natural form when the young woman becomes conscious of her feminine self at puberty. She confines Rapunzel just as she is on the verge of entering womanhood. The confinement has the dual effect of repressing her femininity as well as reducing her to a perpetual child who is in constant need of surveillance and protection.
Yet, to the reform-minded Grimms, the assertion of female sexuality was only natural, except that it had to find expression in a manner consistent with prevailing moral and cultural norms. Marriage was deemed the proper channel once the female reached the age of puberty, because it acknowledged and tamed female sexuality at one and the same time by tying it to the act of procreation. The story makes both points emphatically. The enchantress fails to repress Rapunzel’s femininity, which is expressed through her irrepressible singing despite her physical confinement. This leads to her discovery by a prince, who ends her confinement and offers to marry her.

Overall, the story pinpoints Rapunzel’s moral immunity within the institution of marriage, for, despite defying the enchantress’ injunction to repress her sexuality, she suffers no punishment. Nor does the enchantress’ vicious attempt to prevent Rapunzel from uniting with her lover deter their reunion. The sanctity of marriage, embodied for the most part in the birth of their twins, magically brings the couple together, all the obstacles notwithstanding. The enchantress’ evil intention could achieve no more, precisely because the couple had done no wrong.

Another facet of the story that corresponds to the Grimms’ reformist tendency is their effort at endowing women a freedom of choice in marriage. This is a rather cautious effort that tends to depart from the practice of forced marriage, characteristic of the old patriarchy, by prioritizing such criteria as looks and personality that would yield to women’s consent. Rapunzel’s acceptance to marry the wandering prince without hesitation is a departure from the practice of forced marriage. It echoes the changing mentality of the era that gives partial expression to women’s right of choice in marriage by consciously overstating the inner and outer qualities in men.

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78. This is rather a persuasive argument to sanctify the institution of marriage which seemed like a *desideratum* in Germany. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a high rate of illegitimacy in Germany due, in large measure, to strict controls by church and the state.


80. From this perspective, the relationship between marriage and magic may be explained. Marriage would seem to belong in the realm of magic, 1) as a rare opportunity for social advancement, and 2) as a sacred social convention in uniting couples. Thus, from the moment when the enchantress cuts Rapunzel’s long tresses to prevent the young prince from visiting her, everything that happens is magical.
While cautious in introducing reforms in sexual matters, the Grimms were more resolved in critically tackling other pressing issues such as poverty and social justice. After all, they lived in a revolutionary era in which the idea of social justice dominated the socio-political scene throughout the continent. This led the Grimms to take a more profound approach to social problems, particularly evident in their view of poverty as the underlying cause of many social ills. The issue is brought up again in the story of “Rapunzel”, where they radically depart from the conventional view of morality. When the enchantress comes upon the man (Rapunzel’s father) stealing rampion from her garden, she rebukes him angrily: “How canst thou dare to descend my garden and steal my rampion like a thief? Thou shalt suffer for it!” To this, the man responds: “Ah, let mercy take the place of justice. I only made up my mind to do it out of necessity. My wife saw your rampion from the window, and felt such a longing for it that she would have died if she had not got some to eat.” The fact that the man is caught trying to steal for a second time reveals the popular belief that theft shall not go unnoticed; but since it is committed out of necessity, the enchantress, symbolically representing judicial authority, suddenly softens toward the perpetrator.

To be sure, theft as a profession for the Grimms is an immoral and dishonourable act that can never be justified. This is what the eldest of the four brothers in the story of “The Four Skillful Brothers” says to the man who offers to teach him thievery: “No, that is no longer regarded as a reputable trade, and the end of it is that one has to swing on the gallows.”

Nonetheless, the Grimms’ focus on poverty as the prime cause of social malaise persists and is evident in “The story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was”. Here, poverty is due to the uneven distribution of wealth and its misuse. A seemingly useless but adventurous lad courts danger to experience the sheer thrill of fear, or, as he puts it: “If I could but shudder”. The youth’s adventures end on the third night of his stay in a castle where he encounters a tall old man who intends to kill him, teaching him “what it is to shudder”. This last episode is of crucial importance; it shows that...
fearlessness is essential for achieving the set goals. In the specific context of the story, this means, first and foremost, the courage to speak against injustice, as does the youth when he confronts and defeats the old man and distributes much of his riches between the poor and the king. As the story goes:

The old man led him back into the castle, and in a cellar showed him three chests full of gold. “These,” said he, “one part is for the poor, the other is for the king, the third is thine.”

The old man is a remnant of the old aristocracy, which is alien to the idea of the modern nation-state; a class that in spite of its riches is unproductive and indifferent to social progress. On the other hand, the castle stands as a metaphor for a closed society where monetary economy was considerably limited, and the provisions for supporting the disadvantaged were almost non-existent. These were the obstacles which required courage to supersede. The youth’s fearlessness is all that is needed in order to take the castle away from the old man, an act which is geared toward building a more just society (the state). That the two-thirds of the old man’s riches is divided between the poor and the king is suggestive of a new economy that benefits society at large. This is the path that the Grimms expect children as the future generations of German people to follow, and the youth is both their embodiment and voice.

Another theme around which children were to be socialized by the Grimms was the question of social justice. It is a recurring theme in *Children’s and Household Tales* that calls for new ethical standards governing the relationship between the state and its citizens. The master’s obligation to his servant for the latter’s long-standing service and loyalty is one such theme. It is undoubtedly a feature of pre-modern times, but it is at the same time a deliberate reminder to contemporary entrepreneurs of their responsibilities to the working class. This is symbolically put forth in the story of “Old Sultan” which narrates the relationship between a human person and a faithful dog. Here

a farmer intends to shoot his old and helpless dog, Sultan, who “has not a tooth left in his mouth, and not a thief is afraid of him…” The farmer’s attitude is reflective of the bourgeois mentality of the time that viewed workers as mere instruments of profit making, to be disposed of once no longer of use. This was in contrast to the social conscience of the farmer’s wife: “He [Sultan] has served us for so long, and been so faithful, that we might well give his keep.” While the master rejects this right away, the [dog’s] rescuing the farmer’s child from his wolf friend in a staged act drastically altered the master’s attitude: “Not a hair of yours shall be hurt, you shall eat my bread free as long as you live.”

The tale of “The Fox and the Horse” raises the same issue. A peasant ceases to feed his faithful horse and forces the animal out of the stable, because it could “no longer plough well” and still not “strong enough to bring him a lion.” The horse’s sorrowful remark to the fox who ultimately helps it overcome its problem is in fact a reflection of what the Grimms want their reader to observe: “Alas, avarice and fidelity do not dwell together in this house. My master has forgotten what services I have performed for him for so many years…” The plight of the horse is doubtless a symbol of many citizens who are unable to render the same services they were once capable of, and are placed in a vulnerable position. This is one of the many pressing issues that the Grimms addressed with a view to alleviating the problem through social reforms. To be sure, the Grimms were no radicals, but neither were they unaware of the long-term effects of unjust practices that threatened the unity of the German nation.

If the new set of moral and ethical standards were to be observed by the general public, the German literati had to take the initiative in upholding them, not just in the manner of sacrificing its sex in lieu of blood, as Foucault would assert, but in promoting the basic principles of the modern-nation state. Here again the image of the innocent child as the defining feature of German Romanticism became synonymous with the notion of an authentic culture, and ideology, all perceived as natural, blossomed with

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84. Grimms, Grimm’s Household Tales, vol. 1, 190
85. Grimms, Grimm’s Household Tales, vol. 1, 190-91.
such an image firmly lodged in the popular imagination. This necessitated embracing a different concept of civilization, which was in harmony with the pace of the civilizing process and would give priority to the well-being of the individual citizen. Hence, *Children’s and Household Tales* urges both the public to uphold moral principles and the state to discharge its obligation to the nation in equal measure. This is why only tales selected from the Grimms’ collection made up “the remarkably modest but active and persistent repertoire” that fulfilled “society’s need for magic tales.”

The Grimms’ concern for the social security of the individual citizen is more vocally expressed in stories where the characters are human. The tale of “The Blue Light” is a case in point. A soldier who has served the King in a war is dismissed without any compensation, because he is no longer able to serve due to his wounds. The King’s indifference to the plight of the soldier is particularly revealing: “Thou mayst return to thy home, I need thee no longer, and thou will not receive any more money, for he only receives wages who renders me service for them.” This self-serving justification for laying off a wounded soldier is a matter of moral concern to the Grimms who see it as an unjust and irresponsible practice, as they sympathetically echo the soldier’s anger and frustration: “I have served the King faithfully, but he has dismissed me, and left me to hunger, and now I want to take my revenge.”

Instantiated as an act of carrying out social justice rather than a personal vendetta, the idea of revenge is implemented when the soldier recovers the blue light belonging to the witch inside a well and keeps it for himself. The blue light stands for a magical power but can also be interpreted as a metaphor for both hope and knowledge. Whereas the former emanates courage and determination in the fight against injustice, the latter guides him in achieving the set goal. Once in charge of the blue light, the soldier is not only able to dispossess the parasitic witch of her material possessions, but he also manages to coerce the king into his endorsing his marriage with the King’s daughter, thus sharing his wealth and status.

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87. Dégh, “Grimm’s Household Tales and Its Place in the Household…”, 103.
The State’s lack of commitment towards those serving it is further expressed in the story of “Brother Lustig”, a soldier who retires with “nothing but a small loaf of contract-bread, and four kreuzers in money…” The story raises a number of moral principles such as the obligation to share with the needy, rendering help without expecting anything in return, and seeking alternative means of survival by trying to find new skills. Thus, when Brother Lustig comes across St. Peter who has disguised himself as a beggar, he willingly offers the apostle one fourth of his bread and a kreuzer. He does it on two other occasions when St. Peter appears to him as the second and third beggar, asking him for one fourth of his bread and money. Having consumed the fourth and last portion of his bread and spent the remaining one kreuzer on wine, Brother Lustig has nothing to offer to St. Peter the fourth time he begs him, declaring: “Now my pockets are empty, and if thou has also nothing we can go a-begging together.” Here, the Grimms introduce an important new theme, the unjustified act of begging in the new world of opportunities. St. Peter tells Brother Lustig: “We need not quite do that, I know a little about medicine, and I soon earn as much as I require by that.” Even when Brother Lustig appears reluctant to join St. Peter, the latter urges him on, with the promise that “if I earn anything, thou shall have half of it.”

The closing part of the story is equally important from the viewpoint of historical rupture with the past. It pertains to the re-interpretation of the Christian eschatological notions of Hell and Heaven, which had hitherto been representative of the secular and religious worldviews respectively. After all, the choice of a soldier and a saint as the two main protagonists of the story is no coincidence but a conscious effort at portraying the two parallel worldviews through the conflicting relationship between the two characters. By bringing forth the nature of this interaction, the Grimms turn the Christian dichotomy of Hell and Heaven upside down, thus dissociating the former from the secular worldview.

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88 Grimms, *Grimm’s Household Tales*, vol. 2, 123, 150.
89 Grimms, *Grimm’s Household Tales*, vol. 1, 313.
Each character represents his own worldview. The soldier seeks financial reward for his service; the saint, on the other hand, refuses to take anything. Their conflict is triggered when Brother Lustig consumes the heart of the lamb for supper by himself in St. Peter’s absence and does not admit to the act. He conceals it to the extent of denying that the animal had a heart. Eating the heart of the lamb may be seen as a metaphor for taking the flesh of Christ (the lamb) in Holy Communion, but it also symbolizes sensuality. His denial is to absolve himself of the sinfulness of sensual desire. St. Peter blocks Brother Lustig’s entry to Heaven; yet, given his generosity to a saint, he is too good to be consigned to Hell. On his way back to the gates of Heaven, he lets himself in by tricking St. Peter. This is immensely significant not only because sensuality is no longer regarded a punishable sin, but also because the notion of Heaven as reward for proper behaviour assumes a secular character, a metaphor for a worry-free age of retirement that was yet to come.

The Historical Break with the Past

Although the secular element in the Grimms’ fairy tales does not necessarily contradict their religious faith, it however does subordinate spiritual to worldly affairs in a manner consistent with the imperatives of modern capitalism. It seems as though God has descended to the earth to reward the faithful for their good deeds not so much in the afterlife as in the present world with material gains. The shoemaker in the story of “The Elves” is a good example. He has been left with just enough leather to make his last pair of shoes. But he has “a good conscience” and commends himself to God; the next morning he is astonished to find that the leather has been turned into a beautiful pair of shoes as if intended for a masterpiece. Having sold the pair for more than its regular price, the shoemaker is able to purchase leather for two additional pairs, which were again turned into shoes overnight. The process of accumulation continues until the shoemaker and his wife are rich enough to recompense the little elves who surreptitiously assisted the couple.90

The same holds true of Cinderella whose faith in God, her pious behaviour and moral character ultimately transforms her life. She is prudent, never demanding, and always obeying authority figures, her deprivation and suffering notwithstanding. That these qualities, which the Grimms edited into the Perauldian tale, have the magical effect of improving the living conditions of Cinderella and elevating her to a higher social status, shows the impact of the secular age that assigns exchange value to almost everything. The glamorous life style characteristic of a high culture that awaits her speaks to the point.

This secular focus in the Grimms’ worldview is an indication of historical break with the past mentality that appears time and again in *Children’s and Household Tales*. The story of “Faithful John” is a good example where faith is freed from its religious connotations, associated with temporal rather than spiritual affairs. The reward awaiting the queen for making a great sacrifice to save her royal husband is not the promise of salvation in the afterlife, but the pleasant surprise of finding her two sons alive. But more to the point is the action of the faithful John on the night of the wedding when the bride (the queen) suddenly “turned pale and fell to the ground as if she were dead.” Witnessing this, the loyal servant “ran hastily to her and knelt and sucked three drops of blood from her right breast, and spat them out.” The action cured the dead princess who instantly came back to life. However, observing the seemingly dishonourable act of sucking on his wife’s breast, the King ordered his royal servant to be hanged. Sucking the princess’s breast, an ostensibly sexual act, was an exaggeration of the intrusive medical procedure to which the Grimm prodded their readers to adapt themselves. The King’s reaction is emblematic of the past attitude that sees any bodily contact as suggestive of sexual encounter. Yet the need for using intensive and intrusive methods of treatment in modern times increasingly changed societal attitude towards the intimate nature of interaction between the physician and the patient.

Another indication of the break with the past in the Grimms’ worldview is expressed in legal procedures. They envisioned a society in which there was no room for

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chaos, and for this very reason punitive measures against wrong doers was the monopoly of the state. If punishment was to be proportional to the nature of an offence or crime, it then had to be determined and carried out by designated authorities. This is the moral of the story in “The Three Green Twigs”, where interference in God’s affairs is highly discouraged, for “He alone sits in judgement.”

God is equated to a central authority that knows best what sort of punishment ought to be meted out to a particular offender/criminal, and who should administer it.

**Refined Manners as a Sign of Social Status**

This is a common feature in modern fairy tales intended to set the cultural standards for society as a whole. It was rooted in the cultural transfiguration of the Renaissance, a tradition most powerfully expressed by Erasmus, who held that “everyone who cultivates the mind in liberal studies must be taken to be noble.”

His goal was:

> to replace the idea of noble birth with a new notion of acculturation: the acculturation of formal knowledge and social techniques of the body and of the labor necessary to acquire them, as a substitute for, even something to be regarded above, social station.

What is relevant here is Erasmus’ insistence on “techniques of the body” as “signs of a meritocracy of learning” which allow a person to “acquire nobility in a new-fashioned way.” This is accomplished through refined manners which for him constitute the kind of knowledge representing “both the signifier of nobility and production of nobility.” That such an understanding of nobility in socio-cultural rather than hereditary hereditary terms became the mark of a privileged status is evident from the literature of the post-Renaissance era. Madame d'Aulnoy’s fairy tales, notably “The Blue Bird”, “The Prince Ariel”, and “The Wonderful Sheep” to which we already referred in the preceding

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chapter, may be cited as examples here. Perrault’s collection of magic tales is in some ways a retreat from d’Aulnoy’s new concept of nobility, although it offers new ways of upward social mobility consistent with the imperatives of the absolutist state. The Grimms’ fairy tales however present a more fluid concept of nobility, one which is identifiable through noble and pious acts, and therefore extendable to almost everyone who in one way or another assimilates the dominant culture.

“The Six Swans” is one such story that promotes the new concept of elite, without dismissing the idea of nobility altogether. The story begins with the King’s second wife, a witch who transforms the king’s six sons into swans and lets them fly away. In her quest to deliver her six brothers, the king’s only daughter who by happenstance is left unscathed, takes to the forests in search of her brothers, stops uttering a word until she finds and restores her brothers to their human shape. This is an important moment in the story, for when the princess is spotted by a group of huntsmen and brought before a ruling prince, devoid of all her status symbols, her elegant and courteous manners spoke for themselves all the same. Such instances of her inner beauty led the prince to declare: “She is the one whom I wish to marry, and no other woman in the world.” This is the point where the inner and outer beauty converge, as the King, “smitten with a great love for her…caused her to be dressed in rich garments…”

A similar view is expressed in the story of “The Goose Girl” in which a princess in her long journey to unite with her betrothed in a distant kingdom is overpowered by her accompanying maid-in-waiting. The princess is forced not only to exchange her horse and fine personal garments with those of the maid, but also to surrender her royal identity to a woman of inferior status who would then act as the real princess. But when they arrive in the kingdom, the waiting prince “lifted the waiting-maid”, thinking that “she was his consort.” Even the old King who only looked through the window and saw her, did not fail to see “how dainty and delicate and beautiful she [the actual princess] was. The false statement by the imposter princess that she “picked her up on my way for a companion” did little to change the perceptions of the father and

96. Grimms, Grimm’s Household Tales..., vol. 1, 195.
the son. They continued to see the imposter in like fashion until it was revealed that the true princess was the very same girl who had demonstrated elegant manners.\footnote{Grimms, \textit{Grimm's Household Tales...}, vol. 2, 12-3.}

In both stories, the Grimms’ readers would learn that character is not synonymous with outer beauty (or, indeed, inherited status). As such, inner beauty is not confined to those of high social standing. This is a crucial point in their fairy tales that underlines the "lessons" that might be learned by those who read the stories - not just the child-readers but also the adult. After all, the very notion of nobility was undergoing transformation in social, moral and cultural terms, superseding inherited position, to become an attainable status symbol simply by assimilating the received cultural norms.

The Modern Nation-State and the Promise of Upward Social Mobility

The Grimms’ emphasis on refined manners as a status symbol was a conscious effort not only to promote inter-class marriage, but to extend the dominant culture to the subordinate classes. In doing so, they showed the bulk of the underclass a gateway to upward social mobility. This is precisely what enabled the new elite to exercise its cultural and ideological hegemony over the entire society. The trend was accelerated with the acquisition of knowledge and expertise through modern education which could almost magically catapult one into a higher status. The tale of “The Three Languages” is an example of how possession of magic power or accession to it can change one’s lot dramatically. Much to his father’s dismay, a boy begins to learn the language of animals, an effort that leads to his selection as the Pope. Here, language is the code for a new set of knowledge, and the father’s dismissive attitude reflects popular suspicion of such knowledge. Thus, when the boy stays overnight in a castle with ferocious barking dogs who had devoured many people prior to this, he learns that, “They are bewitched and are obliged to watch over a great treasure which is below the castle, and they can have no rest until it is taken away…” By listening to them, he also discovers the secret, a chest full of gold, which is the reward for this hitherto unrecognized linguistic skill. In like fashion, by understanding the language of the frogs, the boy receives the sad news of the
Pope’s death, and the language of the doves taught him how to celebrate a mass upon his elevation to the Papal throne.

The need for knowledge and expertise as a means of upward social mobility is also seen in the story of “The White Snake”, where technical skills compensate for inequality of status. A royal servant acquires the power of comprehending the language of animals when he surreptitiously eats a morsel of a white snake, from the king’s dining table. This newly acquired linguistic skill invariably helps exonerate him when he is wrongfully accused of stealing the queen’s golden ring. Overhearing a duck confessing to another that she has in fact swallowed the ring, he finds an important piece of evidence that establishes his innocence.

Similarly, when the royal servant sets on a journey to another kingdom his linguistic skill once again proves to be advantageous, but only in so far as it is at the service of ethics. Here, the Grimms radically depart from Perrault’s state-oriented use of knowledge and expertise for upward social mobility, in that they give priority to improving human condition as well as protecting animal lives. Thus, when the kind-hearted servant sees that “three fishes caught in the reeds and gasping for water”, he throws “the three prisoners back into the water”, in spite of the belief that “fishes are dumb”. He also keeps the heavy hooves of his horse off ants upon hearing an ant-king complaining: “Why cannot folks, with their clumsy beasts, keep off our bodies?” Finally, he rescues three abandoned young ravens from starvation by sacrificing his horse, an act for which, like the two previous ones, he is remembered.

Once in a foreign kingdom the royal servant is rewarded by his deeds and expertise. He is catapulted into a much higher status after marryng the King’s daughter, will only marry a man who can fetch a gold ring from the bottom of the sea, or else, like so many before him, forfeit his life. His past practice is vital, for “suddenly he saw three fishes come swimming towards him, and they were the very fishes whose lives he had

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99. The horse as sacrificial lamb may be a reminder that its utility as a principal means of transportation characteristic of the medieval society has ended, and that the value attached to animals in a capitalist society is subject to calculations of utility and profit.
saved. The one in the middle held a mussel in its mouth”, which contained the very gold ring which had been thrown into the sea by the king himself.\footnote{100. Grimms, \textit{Grimm’s Household Tales...}, Vol. 1, 75.}

The princess’ refusal to marry a man who “was not her equal in birth” compelled her plebeian suitor to undertake additional tasks. He was obliged to pick up ten sacks-full of millet-seeds strewed into the garden before the sunset. The impossible task was performed by the grateful ant-king, who “had come in the night with thousands and thousands of ants”, and had “picked up all the millet-seed”. When the discontented princess demanded that the man perform yet another impossible task of obtaining an apple from the Tree of Life, he was aided by the three ravens whom he had saved from starvation. Wandering in vain in search of the Tree of Life, he at last heard “a rustling in the branches [of a tree], and a golden apple fell into his hand.” Thenceforth, “three ravens flew to him, perched themselves upon his knee, and said: “we flew over to the sea to the end of the world, where the Tree of Life stands, and have brought you the apple.”\footnote{101. Grimms, \textit{Grimm’s Household Tales...}, Vol. 1, 76.}

The end of the story is the most interesting part in that it is geared towards a secular worldview. Having obtained the Golden Apple, the man took it to the princess, who cut it into two halves and they both ate it. Considering the metaphorical importance of “the apple” in the Biblical story of “Genesis”, this is an act that could well be interpreted as symbol of sexual climax. The apple is picked neither by the princess nor by her lover, but is sinlessly brought to them by the ravens. Unlike the Biblical account of creation, the princess does not fall from grace for eating the apple; instead, she experiences intense love for her husband-to-be, a man of humble origin. The creation myth is deliberately reversed in favour of a more loving relationship between men and women.

The link between knowledge and upward social mobility is further expounded in the story of “The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs”. A poor woman gives birth to a son with a caul, a commonly read sign that he would marry the king’s daughter once he turns fourteen. The king’s objection to the idea of marriage between two socially unequal
partners is an obstacle to upward social mobility. It prompts him to contemplate the destruction of the new-born, though in vain.

Yet the youth proves himself worthy of the marriage by magically performing difficult tasks, which accord him equal status. When the king tells him: “whosoever marries my daughter must fetch me from hell three golden hairs from the head of the devil”, the youth instantly sets out. In the course of his adventure three unusual questions are posed to him: “why our market-fountain, which once flowed with wine has become dry, and no longer gives even water?”, asks a town watchman; “why a tree in our town which once bore golden apples now does not even put forth leaves?” asks the gatekeeper of another town; “why I must always be rowing backwards and forwards, and am never set free?”, asks a ferryman. Determined to find the answers, the youth enters the house of the devil, where he is assisted by the devil’s grandmother not only to pluck the three golden hairs from the head of her grandson, but also cunningly extract from him the answer to the three questions.

Having extracted the answers, he tells the town watchman on his way back that “there is a toad sitting under the stone in the well; if they killed it, the wine would flow again.” He then tells the town gatekeeper what he had heard from the devil: “A mouse is gnawing at the root [of the tree]; if they killed this they would have golden apples again, but if it gnaws much longer the tree will wither altogether.” Finally, he tells the ferryman the advice given by the devil: “when any one comes and wants to go across he must put the oar in his hand, and the other man will have to ferry and he will be free.”

There is no doubt that these questions address the most pressing issues of nineteenth-century Germany. The toad is the metaphor for sluggish development, and the market fountain for a collective source of wealth, which should not to be blocked. The mouse gnawing at the roots of the tree stands for the old aristocracy whose appropriation of wealth and resources had brought the German confederations to the brink of collapse; and killing the mouse is a message for ousting the aristocracy, a long-standing aspiration realized in the symbolic banishment of the king. Upon his return, the boy presents the three golden hairs to the king, but he also brings with him four asses laden with gold, which are apparently the financial reward for his acquired knowledge.
This is where the Grimms’ liberal political views become more apparent. When the king sees such “tremendous wealth”, he asks his now son-in-law where he too can obtain it. The latter guides him to the shore where the ferryman “put the oar in his hand and sprang out”, whence “the king had to ferry, as a punishment for his sin” of idleness and parasitism in the Grimms’ historical perspective.102

Both figuratively and literally, the above story underscores the Grimms’ secular worldview. It makes the point that the sole purpose of wealth is to enjoy a better life. This is a message that also appears in their other stories, as for example in “Donkey Cabbages”. When “he [the huntsman] gathered together a heap of gold” by swallowing the magical bird heart, he asked himself: “Of what use is all my gold to me if I stay at home? I will go forth and see the world.” On a larger scale, wealth ensures the welfare of individual citizens, a subject which is well brought up in the tale of “The Grave-Mound”. A rich farmer is smugly counting his assets, there comes a knock at the door of his heart and a voice asks, “Hast thou considered the necessities of the poor? Hast thou shared thy bread with the hungry? Has thou been contented with what thou hast, or didst thou always desire to have more?” To this, the heart answers: “I have been hard and pitiless, and have never shown any kindness to my own family. If a beggar came, I turned away my eyes from him. I have not troubled myself about God, but have thought only of increasing my wealth…”103

**Money, Industry, and the Prospect of a Better Life**

If the primary function of wealth in a modern nation-state was to help create the foundations of a welfare state, the most efficient way of acquiring wealth was industrialization, which in turn necessitated technological innovation. This is precisely what the Grimms emphasize in other tales where fairies assume new roles in accordance with the requirements of modern society. As Marthe Robert states: “It would be useless to search in the majority of the German tales for a fairy in a sparkling dress, with a star on her forehead and a wand in her hand, who arrives at the nick of time to arrange love-

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matters for young people.” To her, the good fairy in German tradition is identified with a “wise old woman”, “one who brings children into the world and enforces the rule of *sagesse*, that is, who supervise the strict observance of the rites presiding at childbirth and at every important act of life.”

The assigned role to fairies is that of technological agency for improving the human condition. The story of “The True Sweetheart” is an example. The stepmother’s excessive demands from her stepdaughter to perform manual labour emblematic of a pre-industrial world that can no longer cope with increased production. When the young maiden is ordered by the stepmother to pick twelve pounds of feathers by the evening, or else “thou mayst expect a good beating”, all she could do was to shed tears. It was impossible to complete such an arduous task in just one day. But modern technology in the guise of a fairy godmother intervenes to accomplish such an enormous task almost instantly. “Do not be afraid, my child; rest a while”, said the good old woman, “and in the mean time I will look to thy work.”

Similarly, when the stepmother instructs the maiden to perform yet another impossible task, the emptying of a big pond with a spoon by sunset, the fairy godmother appears in the nick of time, telling her: “Go into the thicket and lie down and sleep: I will soon do thy work.” The final and more difficult task demanded of her is to build a splendid castle on the plain by evening. But as “she entered the valley, the rocks were there, piled up one above the other, and all her strength would not have enabled her even to move the very smallest of them.” Manual labour was hopelessly inadequate to the task, but the fairy godmother acting as a technological agent appeared once again to complete the task. As the maiden sits down and cries, the old woman comforts her saying: “Lie down there in the shade and sleep, I will soon build the castle for thee. If it would be a pleasure to thee, thou canst live in it thyself.”

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Concomitantly, the indispensability of technology for major industrial projects and ultimately for generating wealth is shown in the abundance of luxurious and fine items which are placed inside the castle. As the story goes: “She at first did not know how to reconcile herself with her fortune”, as she observed, “the chests were filled with gold or silver, or with pearls and jewels, and she never felt a desire that she was not able to gratify.” Incidentally, the prevalence of such elegant items as the magnificent golden and silver outfits in the castle speaks to a high culture that often accompanies material prosperity. This is representative of a whole new era that witnessed a significant decline in the use of manual labour, especially its compulsory form, which is symbolized in the death of the stepmother by the trapdoor while inspecting the finished castle.

The story of “The Drummer” conveys similar views, with the additional emphasis on the role of technology in furthering the cause of humanity. A drummer is determined to free a King’s daughter from the power of a witch living atop a glass mountain. The task was superhuman: not only did the road to the mountain pass through a forest infested with man-eaters, but the mountain itself was too slippery to climb. First, using a fear tactic on the man-eating giants, he manages to make them carry him to the skirt of the mountain, and second, by tricking two men arguing over the ownership of a flying saddle, he takes charge of it and instantly gets to the top of the glass mountain. This sets off the next round of impossible tasks driven by technology in the guise of an angel-like maiden. Thus, when the old witch demands the emptying of a great pond with only a thimble before nightfall and picking out all the fishes by their kind and size, the maiden appears, telling him: “I will help thee out of thy difficulty. Thou art tired, lay thy head up in my lap, and sleep. When thou awakes again, thy work will be done.”

Comfort and speed, the two related features of technology, are clearly mentioned in the maiden’s reassuring words. The same words are repeated when she appears again to assist the drummer who is forced to “hew down the whole of forest, split the wood into logs, and pile them up”; and finally to “arrange all the wood in one heap, set fire to it, and burn it” Here, the enormity of the task suggests industrial mass production with tools and machine of high quality. The leaden axe, tin mallet, and wedges, which the witch gave to the drummer to fell the trees were useless for so great
a task. As he begins cutting the trees, “the edge of the axe turned back, and the mallet and wedges were beaten out of shape.”

New tools and machinery for major projects are bearers of new ideas that undermine old social attitudes. In the story of “The Six Servants”, the queen mother follows tradition as she demurs at the prospect of her daughter marrying a man of lower status in spite of the latter’s successful completion of the set tasks. But he is in fact the king’s son, who deliberately conceals his true identity by introducing himself to his high-born wife as a swineherd. In the story, it is achievement rather than status that enables him to marry a beautiful princess.

**Capitalist Production and Market Economy**

If modern capitalist society provided people of humble origin with a means to rise in social hierarchy, it also encouraged the more enlightened members of the aristocracy to shift to monetary economy. The latter entailed an understanding of the dynamics of the market economy that guided the individual entrepreneur as to where to invest, what to produce, and where to sell for maximum profit. This often necessitated seeking markets in remote areas, which is exactly what the story of “The Three Sons of Fortune” conveys. An old King anticipating his imminent death summons his three sons, whom he addresses thus: “I have wished to take thought for you before my end; money I have not, and what I now give you seems of little worth, but all depends on your making a sensible use of it.” Such offers by the old King in the absence of monetary resources is symptomatic of a declining aristocracy buckled under the pressure of emerging economic forces that gave rise to a new social elite. The old king signals the shifting historical environment, urging his sons to act accordingly. This is seen in his offer of a cock to the first son, a scythe to the second, and a cat to the third, advising them to sell their share only “where such things are still unknown and your fortune is made.”

That all three succeed in selling the offerings in remote places indicates how insight into the market economy will generate enormous wealth, as symbolized by each son bringing a mule laden with gold.

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Another important aspect of the story is the introduction of the modern concept of time with its division into smaller units in an urban and industrialized setting. It sets off the pre-industrial conception of time against the modern complex society essential with its precision and punctuality as a precondition to productive work. The introduction of cock to the people of an island is a metaphor for modern concept of time, as they “knew nothing about clocks, and did not even understand how to divide their time.” “They certainly knew when it was morning and evening, but at night, if they did not sleep through it, not one of them knew how to find out the time.”

Cultural Purity and the Exclusion of Others

As good nationalists, the Grimms believed that “language, religion, and poetry, as well as heroic virtues manifested in the ancestral epics, would make Germans conscious of their national values and effective in their struggle for national survival and independence in their age of political turbulence.” The nostalgic reference to the Holy Roman Empire as the embodiment of unified Germany, and the appeal to the distinct but culturally homogeneous classes for its creation, set the trend for the exclusion of the Jews and the Gypsies from the German nation. Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), the German poet and literary critic, was certainly right when he remarked: “the entry ticket to European culture came in the form of baptism.”

The tendency to exclude others was symptomatic of ethnic nationalism, which, unlike its civic/secular model, was exclusive to the community by heredity. The ethnic model is certainly conducive to religious and racial forms of discrimination, as in nineteenth-century Germany where the Jewish population continued to be denied equal rights even after the Jewish emancipation during the first half of nineteenth century. Such a model is as much a staple of the Grimms’ political ideology as is their civic/secular model of nationalism, which finds expression in their fairy tales. The tale of “The Jew

Among Thorns” is an example that is laden with an anti-Semitic theme. This is the evolution of an earlier story called “The Dance Among Thorns”, told in Europe since the fifteenth century. In this older version of the story, a boy forces a monk to dance in thorns by playing magic flute or fiddle as a well-deserved punishment for the latter’s “crimes both specified and assumed”, which clearly echoes “the anticlerical sentiment of many medieval and Renaissance jest books….” The Grimms’ version has a Jew in place of the monk, a change in the cast of character that points to the growing resentment towards the Jewish community. Here, a good servant receives only three farthings for three years of honest service to his master. Being a good person, the servant gives away the three farthings to a seemingly needy dwarf who in turn grants him three wishes: “first, for a gun, which shall hit everything that I aim at; secondly for a fiddle, which when I play on it, shall compel all who hear it to dance; thirdly, that if I ask a favour of any one he shall not be able to refuse it.”

Now the tale turns cruelly anti-Semitic. The servant encounters a Jew with a singing bird, shoots it into a thicket, and taunts the Jew, “go, you rogue, and fetch the bird out for yourself.” As the Jew crawls into the thicket to retrieve the bird, the servant plays his fiddle; the Jew at once dances violently, and “the thorns tore his shabby coat for him, combed his beard, and pricked and plucked him all over the body.” He dismisses the Jew’s plea for mercy: “You have fleeced people often enough, now thorn-bushes shall do the same to you.” The servant stops playing his fiddle only when the Jew presents him with “a purse full of gold.” The Jew then complains to the town justice that the servant had stolen his gold. When he is duly condemned to death, the servant uses his third boon by asking to play his fiddle, and he compels the uncontrollably dancing judge to reverse the death sentence. The servant returns to the Jew and extracts a confession on the source of his money: “I stole it, I stole it! but you [the servant] have honestly earned it.”

112. In the original German language, it is not a dwarf but an apprentice who comes into contact with the servant.
It is apparent from the above story that the association between personal character and religious affiliation is exclusively applicable to a person of Jewish background. The rich master who niggardly pays his servant three farthings for three years of service is neither heavily criticized, nor is his religious identity a matter of public scrutiny. On the contrary, the Jew is by definition, both racially and religiously, a wrong doer whose only job is to exploit others, and is therefore the subject of abhorrence. All this at the time when the formation of class alliance for the creation of a unified Germany was deemed necessary made the culturally alien and socially misfit Jew a scapegoat for the excesses of the German entrepreneur class.

This is where the tension between ethnic and secular forms of nationalism comes to the surface with a tendency to disrupt the civilizing process. If modernity as a philosophical expression of the process increasingly came to be framed within the confines of the modern nation-state and defined in the language of rights, ethnic nationalism was a deviation from it. This contradiction spawned the seeds of violent ethno-nationalism in Germany. The intention here is not to blame the Grimms for one of the greatest tragedies of modern history, but only to show their intellectual contribution to an already existing trend. This was a negative ramification of German Romanticism that tarnished the image of the innocent child. But it also had a positive side to which we shall turn in the next chapter.

The insistence on the purity of German culture had a profound impact on the concept of childhood. Once cultural purity was associated with nature and personified in the child image, the pressure on children to live up to the ideal intensified. Historically, the subjection of children to systematic discipline was part of a broad movement that began at the end of the seventeenth century, a movement that likewise aimed at subjugating women, the underclass, and by extension the colonized. Charles Perrault’s *Histoires ou Contes du Temps passé*, as already noted, is an early example of this system of surveillance that greatly contributed to the modern concept of childhood.

The Romantic image of the child was an expansion of the earlier concept of childhood in the age of modern nation-state. Included in the concept were children of the poor and the underclass, who were now subjected to increased discipline, a process
accelerated by the rise of modern school system in the later nineteenth century. This is
the wider context in which children of the elite and the poor joined hands in defying the
authoritarian world of adults, their class differences notwithstanding.

The trend was especially aided by the inner contradictions of German Romanticism that on the one hand made the child image an object and metaphor of social
control, while on the other promoting it as a paragon of purity and all that was natural.
The latter was imbued with the spirit of freedom and natural self-expression that
increasingly became the defining features of childhood. Friedrich Schiller’s description
of a “lost childhood” that “eternally remains within us” was in fact an acknowledgment
of such attributes of childhood that underlay the child of Romanticism. To him, “children
are what we were; they are what we should once again become. We were nature just as
they, and our culture, by means of reason and freedom, should lead us back to nature.”

What Schiller and other Romantics like him articulated had a universal appeal that
 accorded children a highly revered status in society, much in line with the revolution in
the history of emotions. This concurs with what Ariès may call a two-fold process, for
while modernity subjected children to strict discipline, it at the same time marked “the
beginning of respect for childhood.” The process was ultimately settled in favour of
the latter as the later modern disciplinary system began to loosen its grip over Western
society, as embodied in the liberation of childhood from its oppressive connotation.

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115. Ariès, Centuries..., 109.
Chapter VI: The Escape from Innocence: Contradictions of Modern Childhood

The shift in the social perception of childhood is the underlying mechanism for the recognition of the child’s special character and ultimately his/her emergence as an historical subject. It is at this historical juncture that the child could begin to assert his/her will, to act as an agent of change, and to break free from the adult projected image of childhood. This is in conjunction with what I have argued in chapter I on childhood and historical agency, which I revisit in the present chapter by focusing on some of the literary works of the Victorian era. I begin with an historical exposition of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, followed by an analysis of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in the wonderland*, and a brief discussion of George MacDonald’s “The Light Princess”, and then conclude with Mark Twin’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, all of which, in one way or the other, depart from the Romantic/Victorian view of childhood.

The works cited are also consistent with the theme in chapter II on the conceptual vicissitude of childhood. Not only do they reveal the thought processes that accompanied the changing social attitude to childhood, but they also demonstrate the child’s own initiative in elevating his/her status. In this respect, we can argue with full confidence that childhood as a concept is not a fixed entity but a social construct that undergoes transformation from one historical period to another. But beyond all this, the literary works deployed in this chapter, though only a select few, usher in the changing direction of the civilizing process. The march towards a more egalitarian concept of childhood, escape from childhood innocence, and the language of rights are what we witness in the later phase of the civilizing process, and are also what such literary works emanate. The focus is on the redemptive potential of childhood that not only liberate children but by extension a broad spectrum of “inadequate adults”, who were all subjected to an oppressive system of discipline.

The Reconstruction of Modern Childhood: David Copperfield

Jack Zipes speaks of a new literary trend in the second half of nineteenth century whereby “numerous writers continued the 'romantic' project of subverting the formal structure of the canonized tales.” This had a profound impact on classical tales, as they were “turned upside
down and inside out to question the value system upheld by the dominant socialization process and to keep wonder, curiosity, and creativity alive.”

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was undoubtedly a leading figure who took the Romantic child to a new level. He enlarged the concept of childhood, not only by introducing the child of poverty in his conceptual reconstruction of childhood, but also by diverging from both its medieval and modern view. Dickens’s child of fiction is neither a miniature adult, nor a typical modern child; yet it shares both the adult qualities of the medieval child and the childlike characteristic of the modern child. He is a parentless child, who identifies with the poor, yet his quest for proper care and education confronts him with middle-class aspirations. Dickens’ child of fiction is both naturally and intellectually endowed with the agency of the subversive.

In almost every one of his novels, there is a child who deviates from the prevailing notion of childhood innocence, as s/he enters the adult world. Thus, in *David Copperfield*, to quote Leonard Manheim: “This belated exodus from the world of pre-natal omnipotence is followed in *David Copperfield* by other variants of the HERO-MYTH, which we find in one form or another in every Dickens novel that has a child in it.” Here, Dickens’ child resembles the medieval child who actively mingles with adults, and contrary to what Jean Jacques Rousseau believed, is “an adult in prospectu.” Nonetheless, this modern variant of the miniature adult is markedly different from his/her medieval counterpart. S/he is a neglected and oppressed child who is in dire need of protection and emotional security, notwithstanding his/her manifest maturity. The child experiences the oppression both of the age-segregated institution of the boarding school and of the company of adults through child labour. Dickens’ child, David Copperfield, therefore endures the dual oppression of both the school and the street.

Yet despite being thrown into the adult world as a parentless labouring child, this fictional character refuses to relinquish his childlike characteristics. He is distinctly modern for being conscious of his own world and unique experience as a child, but at the same time, he is medieval for refusing to be treated like a child through school regulations. Dickens’ child discards his innocence in order to regain his/her lost sense of childhood. In doing so,

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the child also tends to free the female body from the chain of sexual repression by relating
to its charm and beauty. Dickens has a child hero, both real and a favourite, and is referred
to by name: “like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And his
name is David Copperfield.”

The life history of David Copperfield is, by his own admission, a mixture of fiction
and reality inspired by Dickens’s own childhood experience. It is the story of a young boy
born six months after his father’s death. The thought of being fatherless consumes his entire
youth; but this does not necessarily deny him the joys of childhood. The comforting presence
of his mother, Clara Copperfield, and of his nursemaid, Peggotty, provide the needed
emotional security. However, at the age of eight his situation changes with the arrival of Mr
Murdstone, his stepfather, and his sister Miss Murdstone, who also moves into the
Copperfield household soon after. Both embody “the stereotypical Victorian Villain [s]”
Both treat David harshly, through corporal punishment and psychological torture, so much
so that years later when he reflects on this phase of his life he says: “The remembrance of
that life is fraught with so much pain to me, with so much mental suffering and want of
hope…”3 The name Murdstone conveys the image, being a combination of murder and
stone; Dickens has Betsy Trotwood, David’s aunt, refer to him as Murderous.4

But cruelty and harshness to what end? The answer lies in the dominant cultural
discourses of the modern period that places the child as an object and metaphor of
oppression, a theme whose artistic presentation makes the novel a masterpiece. The idea of
the child being always at play is central. David Copperfield is a child who actively holds
onto his childlike features, which make him the hapless target of the repressive Victorian
culture, embodied in Mr and Miss Murdstone. This is when he starts feeling unhappy for
being both deprived and fatherless, wondering whether the boys who “came running after us
[in the coach], and got up behind and swung there for a little while” had fathers, and that
“whether they were happy at home.” David is particularly vulnerable, as his mother is unable
to stand up to the bullying of her husband and her sister in-law. She is herself viewed as
socially inadequate and treated as such, because like children she is artless, naturally

4. See for example Joseph Bottum, “The Gentleman’s True Name: David Copperfield and the Philosophy of
inclined, and non-assertive. This is precisely how Miss Murdstone remembers David’s mother when she says in her disparaging manner, “I consider the lamented Clara to have been, in all essential respects, a mere child.” This is an acute observation made by Dickens that underlies his critical view of the modern concept of childhood as essentially a pretence for domination. As we proceed further in the novel, it becomes clear that Clara’s treatment as a child by the Murdstones is in fact intended to take possession of her properties, a plan which is accomplished by causing her death. Reflecting on the death of his mother years later, David deplores her plight: “I suppose she was to be subdued and broken to their detestable mould”, adding that “since the sister came to help, the brother and sister between them have nearly reduced her to a state of imbecility.”

As for David, the road to dominance begins with the destruction of the child within and its substitution with a docile and submissive one in the modern school system. It is no wonder then that David’s sufferings at the hands of the sadistic Murdstones begins after they take charge of his education. This meant first and foremost reforming his “wicked’ character”, by trying to rid him of a “sullen disposition”, with which he was characterized, all in an effort to make him obsequious to their cultural dictates. As David recalls: “He [Mr Murdstone] ordered me like a dog, and I obeyed like a dog.” Not learning his lessons or rather not following his dictates, is good enough a reason for Mr. Murdstone to mete out corporal punishment to him. He remembers quite vividly: “Mr. Murdstone comes out of his chair, takes the book, throws it at me or boxes my ear with it, and turns me out of the room by the shoulders.” But “the worst was yet to happen”, as Mr. Murdstone suddenly twists David’s head under his arm, while the latter begs for mercy: “Mr. Murdstone! Sir! I cried to him. Don’t! pray don’t beat me! I have tried to learn, sir, but I can’t learn while you and Miss Murdstone are by. I can’t indeed.”

David’s act of biting Mr. Murdstone’s hand to stop the beating is the spontaneous reaction of a child who tries to convey that his child’s spirit is still alive, despite the pressure to break it down. His imprisonment in his room for the next five days as a punishment for the act is a dreadful experience that is both demeaning and isolating. As he recounts it:

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I was a prisoner – the strange sensation of never hearing myself speak – the fleeting
intervals of something like cheerfulness, which came with eating and drinking, and
went away with it – the setting in of rain one evening, with a fresh smell, and its
coming down faster and faster between me and the church, until it and gathering night
seem to quench me in gloom, fear, and remorse...  

However, David was devastated more by the sense of guilt that was induced by
this experience:

How well I recollect, when I became quiet, when an unnatural stillness seems to reign
through the whole house! How well I remember, when my smart and passion began
to cool, how wicked I began to feel!... I sat listening for a long while, but there was
not a sound, I crawled up from the floor, and saw my face in the glass, so swollen,
red, and ugly that it almost frightened me. My stripes were sore and stiff, and made
me cry afresh, when I moved; but they were nothing to the guilt I felt. It lay heavier
on my breast than I had been a most atrocious criminal, I dare say. 

Yet David is resilient and his childlike features are so naturally engraved that no
such experience can undermine them, thanks in large measure to the care and nurture he has
received from both his mother and Peggotty. The latter’s whispers through the keyhole at
night, reassuring him of continued love and affection, act as magical words that help him
return to his normal emotional state. After all, the whispers in the Murdstone-dominated
household are symptomatic of a repressed culture, an oral and informal one, expressed
through the kind words of a nursemaid, to which David had been exposed since birth. Being
familiar and comfortable with it, he can sense it right away. “Is that you, Peggotty dear?”,
says David as soon as he hears the whispers. “Yes my own precious Davy”, replies Peggotty.
This brief encounter between the two is symptomatic of a mutual feeling of love and
affection that one has for the other. While David’s emotional attachment to Peggotty is an
expression of love for a mother figure, the latter’s affection is representative of an unmarried

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woman that often carries the imprint of social inferiority, as when she addresses him with adoring formality “Master Davy”. This suggests why David feels so close to Peggotty:

From that night there grow up in my breast a feeling for Peggotty which I cannot very well define. She did nor replace my mother; no one could do that; but she came into a vacancy in my heart which closed upon her, and I felt towards her something I had never felt for any other human being.9

David’s pleasant experience of living among Peggotty’s relatives in a boathouse at Yarmouth before his mother’s marriage with Murdstone suggests the filiation of childhood to unlettered innocence. His intimacy with them is almost instantly established when Ham, the orphaned nephew of Peggotty, acting as an old acquaintance, carries him home on his back, even though David does not think he knows him. Mr. Peggotty, his nursemaid’s brother, expresses this warmth well through his caution to David: “You’ll find us rough, sir, but you’ll find us ready.”10 David himself elegantly described the sense of affinity with the socially marginalized following his second visit to the family:

The idea of being again surrounded by those honest faces, shining welcome on me; of renewing the peacefulness of the sweet Sunday morning, when the bells were ringing, the stone dropping in the water, and the shadowy ships breaking through the mist; of roaming up and down with little Emily, telling her my troubles, and finding charms against them in the shells and pebbles on the beach; made a calm in my heart.11

Oral culture is associated with childhood. David’s professes a pure love for Peggotty’s niece, the little Emily whom he wishes to marry and go “away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children ever.”

Dickens’ allusion to the Aristotelian concept of virtue is evident. He regarded childhood as the embodiment of love and intimacy to be preserved into old age, and wisdom

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as the departure from it. Peggotty contrasted the difference between love and wisdom, valorized love, and described to David his father’s kindness to his mother. She recalls his telling Clara when doubting herself that “a loving heart was better and stronger than wisdom, and that he was a happy man in hers.”12 Here, Dickens propounds a general thesis of love which “cannot be institutionalized”, but is nonetheless “the only force capable of ordering this world.”13

The association between childhood and love, and their affinity with a childlike female persona (mother Clara) and a socio-culturally inferior nursemaid is an offence against the cultural values of the literate elite represented by such ostentatious individuals as the Murdstones. David learns as much on returning home from his boarding school at Salem House for a visit. He has, of course, “a strange feeling” of going home ‘when it was not home”, for “every object I looked at, reminded me of the happy old home”, but the dream-like idea of being together with his mother and Peggotty “undisturbed” is what recreates the old image of home for him. Once at home, he sits “with Peggotty in the kitchen”, feeling “comfortable and not afraid of being myself.” But this moment of comfort and intimacy that he experiences with Peggotty is perceived as culturally subversive by Mr. Murdstone, who reproaches David for having “an attachment to low and common company.” The emotional ties between the two recalls the old alliance between childhood and the culture of the unlettered, an alliance that was broken in especially by the literate elite. Dickens’ child hero tries to rebuild it by redeeming his lost relationship with the class that his nursemaid represents. In so doing, he attempts a light-hearted and affectionate inversion of the attribute “bestial” that was applied to the underclass: “I was quite heart-broken myself, and am afraid that in the first transports of wounded tenderness, I called Peggotty a ‘beast’.”

David likewise wants to emancipate his mother whom he describes as both “a childish widow” and “a childish mother.” Such descriptions, unlike the one used by Miss Murdstone, are deployed to free childhood from the negative connotations that project a weak image of the child, and worse, reduce it to a metaphor of oppression. David’s resentment toward his mother for not showing her love in front of Mr Murdstone is a reaction

to this particular concept of childhood, as when she gives in to her husband’s command: “Clara, be firm with the boy. Don’t say ‘Oh Davy, Davy!’ That’s childish.” He is equally resentful when his mother feels sorry for him for being labelled a “wicked fellow” by the Murdstones rather than for his being sent off to boarding school. On the other hand, he is glad to know that, as he was leaving, “my mother cried too, and I felt her heart beat against mine.”14 Such instances confirm David’s overall objective to subvert the prevailing concept of childhood by reinventing a contesting view, one which is empowering but nonetheless cognizant of the childlike tendency that resides in everyone, children and adults alike.

What’s more, in emancipating his “mother of infancy”, David unveils her feminine beauty, which is so closely related to the childlike attribute of a widowed mother. His focus on her comforting feminine presence is a conscious attempt at liberating her femininity from the chains of oppression. As he recalls upon returning home:

I crept close to my mother’s side, according to my old custom, broken now a long time, and sat with my arms embracing her waist, and my little red cheeks on her shoulder and once more felt her drooping over me – like an angel’ wing as I used to think, I recollect – and was very happy indeed.15

Even after his mother’s death, David still relates to her “innocent and girlish beauty”, remembering her “as the young mother of my earliest impressions”, who in her death “winged her way back to her calm, untroubled youth, and cancelled all the rest”.16

This image of his mother as forever childlike is emblematic of “David’s infancy and childhood”, which “are restored to him and preserved in the static world of memory – memory for David, phantasy and imagination for Dickens.”17 It is for this reason that he is drawn to Dora, who comes up with the seemingly ‘stupid” term “child-wife” and insists that he call her so. Not that “you should think of me that way”, she qualifies, but that “[w]hen

you are going to be angry with me, say to yourself, ‘it’s only my child-wife’.”\textsuperscript{18} The same tendency manifests itself when he gazes at a woman’s picture, which to his imagination seems “as if the portrait had grown womanly, and the original remained a child.”\textsuperscript{19} Such an association between childhood and femininity is a subject of interest to a feminist like Deborah Thacker, who draws a parallel between children’s literature and feminism”, thus arguing:

> Though rare, the children’s book that is able to offer its readers an awareness of their own autonomy is more powerful at combating the restrictions of stereotyping, offering, for instance, the possibility of taking the best of feminine and the masculine, resulting in an androgynous apprehension of self.\textsuperscript{20}

As David muses over the above considerations, he seems to be entering the fairy realm that heralds the end of a dark phase and the beginning of a bright one in which he is entrusted with the agency of rescuing the female body, the underclass, and he himself at one and the same time. This is of historical significance, given that each of the three categories as representative of a particular social group had been systematically marginalized over the course of the modern period. As he recalls:

> While I sat thus, looking at the fire, and seeing pictures in the red-hot coals, I almost believed that I had never been away; that Mr. and Miss Murdstone were such pictures, and would vanish when the fire got low; and that there was nothing real in all that I remembered, save my mother, Peggotty, and I.\textsuperscript{21}

The new phase in David’s life does not begin until he is placed in the care of his aunt Betsy Trotwood, his only surviving relative after his mother’s death. Until then, he must endure various forms of oppression visited upon children. This happens when he first leaves

\textsuperscript{18} Dickens, \textit{The Personal History of David Copperfield}, 643-44. See also Bell, “The Emotional Matrix of \textit{David Copperfield}, 642.

\textsuperscript{19} Dickens, \textit{The Personal History of David Copperfield}, 223.

\textsuperscript{20} Thacker, “Feminine Language and the Politics of Children’s Literature”, 5.

\textsuperscript{21} Dickens, \textit{The Personal History of David Copperfield}, 112.
home for Salem House, a boarding school where Mr. Creakle, an acquaintance of Mr. Murdstone, was the head master, and where children’s ribs were reportedly broken. Almost from the moment he boards a carriage to set off for Salem House, he is ill-treated, as when a lady passenger exploits him for merely being a child:

This lady had a basket with her, and she hadn’t known what to do with it, for a long time, until she found that, on account of my legs being short, it could go under me. It cramped and hurt me so, that it made me perfectly miserable; but if I moved in the least, and made a glass that was in the basket rattle against something else (as it was sure to do), she gave me the cruellest poke with her foot…  

At Salem House, David is subjected to humiliation and ridicule from the moment he is handed over to school authorities: “I was in height of my fever when a man entered and whispered to the clerk, who presently slanted me off the scale, and pushed me over to him, as if I were weighed, bought, delivered, and paid for.” Next is his treatment like a dog, as he is forced to carry a placard on his back that reads in the most conspicuous manner: “Take care of him. He bites”23, causing some to pat and smooth him as they do with dogs. Worse is still the attitude of the one-eyed man in gaiters, the personal assistant of Mr. Creakle, who suggests that he better carry ‘a brass collar around his neck’ and be tied up in the stable. Although the suggestion never materializes, carrying the placard on his back is mandatory. On one occasion, when he takes off the writings to avoid embarrassment, he is summoned before Mr. Creakle, who pinches his ear vigorously for disobeying the rules. The ever-present fear of being subjected to strict discipline at Salem House is further exacerbated by the loud and horrific voice of the one-eyed man, repeating verbatim every word of caution uttered by Mr. Creakle, who in the words of David, “had no more right to be possessed of the great trust he held, than to be Lord High Admiral, or Commander-in-Chief -in either of which capacities it is possible that he would have done infinitely less mischief.”

The image of broken ribs provided the requisite dose of disciplinary theatre. It prevented children from asserting their childhood, which on the one hand requires love, care,
and playfulness, and on the other, it shared with adults the quality that persists on equal treatment by adults. David’s recollection of his time at Salem House reveals the emotional vacuum there: “I picture myself going up to bed, among the unused rooms, and sitting on my bedside crying for a comfortable word from Peggotty.” He was deprived of play: “As to my recreation with other children of my age, I had very little of that.” Instead, he was assigned chores by Mr. Murdstone, who tells his mother: “Clara, my dear, there’s nothing like work, give your boy an exercise”, an instruction that causes him “to be clapped down to some new labour there and then.” Elsewhere, he says: “I had become, in the Murdstone and Grinby time, however short or long it may have been, so unused to sports and games of boys, that I knew I was awkward and inexperienced in the commonest things belonging to them.” Even in the happy phase of his childhood, David is still haunted by the recurring thought that as a child he had missed a lot: “I was made infinitely more uncomfortable by the consideration that, in what I did know, I was much farther removed from my companions than in what I did not.”

The death of David’s mother along with her newly born baby (seemingly at the hands of the Murdstones) and Peggotty’s marriage to Mr. Barkis mark another sad chapter in his life. Not only is he deprived of their love and support, but he is forced to enter the labour market as a child labourer at a wine company co-owned by Mr. Murdstone, who believes that this is necessary for a boy of his “disposition, which requires a great deal of correcting”, an occurrence that further removes him from the joys of his childhood. As he recalled:

And now I fell into a state of neglect, which I cannot look back upon without compassion. I fell at once into a solitary condition,-apart from all friendly notice, apart from the society of all other boys of my own age, apart from all companionship but my own spiritless thoughts,- which seems to cast its gloom upon this paper as I write.

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25. Dickens, *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, 73, 78, 90, 80, 55, 228, 229, 151.
His adult quality was expressed through intellectual engagement with the surrounding world, but it remained incomplete in his repressed condition. Hence Miss Murdstone’s perception of him as inept, as when she shouts: “Good heavens, Clara, do you see?... He’s got it! …The boy has got the baby.”27 David’s work at the wine factory represses his adult quality, despite his short-lived memorable experience with his landlord and mentor Wilkins Micawber, who like Dickens’ own father, went to prison for insolvency. This is again a period when he suffers in secret and wishes to return to school, for not only is he reduced to poverty and deprived of his childhood, but thrown into the world of adults, unprotected and oppressed. It is not until he meets Mr. Dick, Aunt Betsy’s friend, that his adult quality finds a free expression. He recalls:

…while Mr. Dick came professedly to look after me as my guardian, he always consulted me in any little matter of doubt that arose, and invariably guided himself by my advice; not only having a high respect for my native sagacity, but considering that I inherited a good deal from my aunt.28

This is the phase when the story turns into a fairy tale, with his aunt, Betsy Trotwood, as the fairy godmother. In contrast to David’s mother, she is an eccentric and remarkably strong woman who can take to task Mr. Murdstone for being “a tyrant” to her grandnephew, and yet she is kind enough to adopt him. It is at this point in time that events usher in a complete reversal in favour of David, as he is no longer a poor, powerless, and neglected child thrown into the world of adults, but one who is protected and treated with utmost respect like an adult. “Should you like to go to school at Canterbury?” asks Aunt Betsy. “I should like it very much”, replies David with delight. Here, Dickens recounts the rebirth of a child whose childhood never had a chance to prosper but now flourishes. Given a bath by Aunt Betsy upon entering her house after days of wandering around is no doubt what the filthy-looking David needs. Yet, the act of giving a bath also symbolizes a rebirth in most religious traditions.

The rebirth is manifested in David’s high spirits at Dr. Strong’s Academy in Canterbury where he is in the company of attentive and compassionate individuals. Among them is Agnes, his confidante, a mature girl of his own age and the daughter of Mr. Wickfield, the school clerk who generously lodges him in his house, and who David observes one evening laying down his head upon his desk, shedding tears like a child. Another person who impresses David is Dr. Strong himself, who is a wise and sensitive man and is “very fond of music.” All three embody one special feature of childhood to which David closely relate, just like Mr. Dick, who makes him a kite with some facts written on it, indicating that “when it flies high, it will take the facts a long way.” It is on account of regaining his sense of childhood that David says: “I was quite at home and happy, among my new companions… I had a great attachment for the Doctor, and I was eminent and distinguished in that little world [school].” This sense of pride is further enhanced as he feels that “[w]e all … had a part in the management of the new place.” Equally beneficial to David is a sense of achievement that his new school as opposed to Salem House invests in him, thus leading him to remark: “I am growing great in Latin verses, and neglect the laces of my boots.”

David also strives and learns to be himself by being a child and upholding his childlike features. “Why should I seek to change”, he asks his wife Dora, “what has been so precious to me for so long?” He then reminds her: “You never can show better than as your own natural self… and we’ll try no conceited experiments, but go back to our old way, and be happy.” This is how Mr. Dick also portrays himself, as he stands exultingly before David to tell him who he is:

A poor fellow with a craze, sir, …a simpleton, a weak-minded person – present company… may do what wonderful people may not do. I’ll bring them together boy, I’ll try. They’ll not blame me. They’ll not object to me. They’ll not mind what I do, if it is wrong. I’m only Mr. Dick. And who minds Dick? Dick’s nobody!”

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Mr. Dick is a complex person who, like David, is both eccentric and childlike. Such persons are truthful as they are, and both are subject to various forms of repression. Aunt Betsy observed with penetration that Mr. Dick is not “mad” but a “proud fool”, who was sent away by his eccentric brother to “some private asylum-place”, since he was not “half so eccentric as a good many people.” She then goes on to say: “I am ready to take care of him, and shall not ill-treat him as some people (besides the asylum-folk) have done.”32 After all, Mr. Dick is as mad and eccentric as he at first appears to David, because he is “impervious to the evil of the world for the simple reason that for him the real world is irrelevant”.33 In this sense, he, too, is a child, just like David, both of whom in Dickens’s view “see truly”, unlike the conventional adults who “have learned to see falsely.” It is here that Dickens’s fictional child hero in novel after novel takes upon himself the added task of redeeming the mad person, besides redeeming women and the underclass, and of course he himself by giving children “a sense of self-worth” and ‘a finely felt” sense of “injustice”.34

Dickens’s child hero is not a universal child. Nor is he above classes in the sense of being devoid of any class affiliations. David Copperfield is a child who very much responds to the historical realities of his time, as he on the one hand imbibes the social aspirations of the middle-class, notably the need for education, and on the other hand, identifies with women, the underclass, and even mad persons. This is a formidable challenge to the culture of the Victorian era that was exclusionist with respect to marginalized groups, including children of poverty who are brought to the fore with the promise of being entitled to what the better-off already enjoy, namely the right to be nurtured and cultured, without necessarily losing one’s childlike characteristics. This is a task that only David would be able to perform, a task that entails bridging the gap between children of diverse social classes through the spread of mass education. Such a task could not have been performed by James Steerforth, the older boy at Salem House, despite his defiance of authority. He is a rich boy who reveals a disparaging attitude towards the poor and women. In fact, his privileged status ensures him preferential treatment at school, for he is never subjected to disciplinary

measures. Conscious of his privileged status, he acts as a self-serving individual with total
disregard for others, as when he dishonours little Emily. The example of James Steerforth
corroborates the thesis that there is no universal concept of childhood, and that there are
marked differences between children in class, gender, and racial terms that determine the
degree to which they may be oppressed. Such categories ought to be taken into consideration
not only individually but also comparatively and in combination.

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland
Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), is another literary figure of the Victorian era whose experience
within a highly regulated middle-class family of mixed clerical and military background
induced rebellion against modern discipline. His life in Rugby school was particularly
dismal. In spite of proving himself a ‘promising boy”, he detested what he had to go through:
“I cannot say … that any earthly considerations would induce me to go through my three
years again … I can honestly say that if I could have been … secure from annoyance at night,
the hardship of the daily life would have been comparative trifles to bear.”35 This experience
remained with him for the rest of his life and resurfaced in his writings, most prominently in
Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.

The novel is a landmark in the history of childhood as it ushers in a change of
focus from the reformation of manners to the language of rights. The change corresponds to
a new phase of modernity that emerges in response to the repressive nature of the Victorian
culture, a critical self-reflection that finds expression in children’s literature of the era. It is
embodied in a character, which has the imagination of a child and the rebellious tendency of
an adolescent, both of which tend to radically alter the hierarchical and hypocritical world
of adults. Here, the imagining child acts as the redemptive force of modernity that advocates
the rights of children and the oppressed alike, thus marking a departure from the prevailing
concept of civilization.

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland has been variously interpreted, but it could be
viewed as a departure from the prevailing model of childhood. Not only does Carroll address
the repression of the child, but he also speaks to the repressed child within each adult in order

to awaken each to the mission of redeeming humanity, thus freeing “childhood from symbolic restraints that limit its ability to reflect true human experience.””\textsuperscript{36} Auerbach noted that “the ultimate effect of Alice’s adventures implicates her, female child though she is, in the troubled human conditions; most Victorians refuse to grant women and children this respect.”\textsuperscript{37} Donald Rackin, on the other hand, has pointed out that Carroll’s initial title of the story, \textit{Alice’s Adventures Under Ground}, “embodies a comic horror-vision of the chaotic land beneath the man-made groundwork of western thought and convention.”\textsuperscript{38} Both accounts in their own specific way denote the child’s assumption of historical agency in a rather subversive manner.

The weapon with which the child is empowered is no more than language in its comic, symbolic and seemingly nonsensical forms. For if language, as used by adults, is “a mode of self-exposure rather than an exercise in logic and semantics”,\textsuperscript{39} it can also be used by children as a means of ridiculing the conventionality of the adult world. Almost from the outset in the story, Alice attempts to assault convention by linguistic alteration. She does so by assigning new meanings to words “in defiance of the language-speaking community to which she belongs.”\textsuperscript{40} “Let me see”, muses Alice, “four times five is five, and four times six is thirteen, and four times seven is – oh dear!” She then turns to geography, and states that “London is the Capital of Paris, and Paris is the capital of Rome…”\textsuperscript{41} Such assertions are nonsensical, but they permit Alice to pursue her struggle against “the forces of authenticity and convention.”\textsuperscript{42} This is only possible in Wonderland where “the false logic of language” is destroyed by “logic itself”\textsuperscript{43}, an act that in turn opens up new subjectivities for linguistic

\textsuperscript{36} Lillian Craton, \textit{The Victorian Freak Show: The Significance of Disability and Physical Differences in 19th-Century Fiction} (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2009), 189.


\textsuperscript{38} Donald Rackin, “Alice’s Journey to the End of Night”, \textit{Publication of the Modern-Language-Association-of-America (PMLA)} 81, no. 5 (October 1996): 313.


\textsuperscript{40} Fiona MacArthur, “Embodied Figures of Speech: Problem-Solving in Alice’s Dream of Wonderland”, \textit{Atlantis} 26, no. 2 (December 2004): 61.


\textsuperscript{43} Rackin, “Alice’s Journey to the End of Night”, 316.
interpretations. Alice’s view on the subject is quite revealing. In response to Humpty-Dumpty who argues that the word means what he chooses it to mean, she ripostes: “The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things.” Alice’s remark concurs with what Lewis Carroll himself once said: “words mean more than we mean to express when we use them…”

This multivalent reading of words is tied to a broader subversive mission, a “symbolic inversion”, manifesting itself in an act of expressive behaviour which “inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, social and political.” in an acts as a becomes apparent once we take into account other scenarios in the story. Alice’s encounter with the cat is quite revealing, as it offers a different and more profound perspective of the world by purposefully turning words upside down. “Well, then, the Cat went on, ‘you see a dog growls when it’s angry, and wags its tail when it’s pleased. Now I growl when I’m pleased, and wag my tail when I’m angry. Therefore I’m mad.”

Here, madness is compatible with the unorthodox, nonconformist, and relaxing environment of Wonderland that stands in sharp contrast to the rationally oriented and time-regulated nature of modern society. In Wonderland madness and idleness go hand in hand. This is what Alice learns after she advises the Hatter to “do something better with the time than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers”, and the Mad Hatter retorts: “If you know Time as well as I do, you wouldn’t talk about wasting it.” He continues by adding that in Wonderland “it’s always a tea-time”, a custom symbolically played up by the action of March Hare who took the watch and “dipped it into his cup of tea…”

The embodiment of authority above ground, the Queen of Hearts threatened to behead the Mad Hatter for murdering time.

Equally subversive is Lewis Carroll’s choice of a female child who is at “an age susceptible to authority” and carries the Wordsworthian “double cultural emphasis placed

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47. Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 99, 104.
48. MacArthur, “Embodied Figures of Speech…”, 60. Here, MacArthur’s use of the phrase “susceptibility to authority” is intended to mean believing in authorities as authentic sources.
on femininity and childhood.”49 Alice’s uninhibited curiosity offends against the Victorian morality: its “sentimental views about girlishness and chastity” almost equated childhood with girlhood.50 Lewis Carroll’s subsequent depiction of Alice as a dream-child with an innocent and yet wildly curious and earthy side further debunks the Victorian cultural universe. As he remarks:

What wert thou, dream-Alice, in thy foster-father’s eyes? How shall he picture thee? Loving, first, loving and gentle: loving as a dog (forgive the prosaic simile, but I know of no earthy love so pure and perfect). and gentle as a fawn:… and lastly, curious and wildly curious, and with eager enjoyment of Life that comes only in the happy hours of childhood, when all is new and fair, and when sin and sorrow are but names – empty words, signifying nothing.51

Carroll expressed his desire to upset the repressive Victorian culture through his artistic creation of Wonderland, the imaginary world of freedom that opens “a temporary guilt-free and relatively anxiety-free communication to the unconscious.”52 It is therefore no coincidence that the story begins with the curious little Alice going down the rabbit hole all the way to “the centre of the earth”, without ever “considering how in the world she was to get out again.” This resembles the experience of fall from grace resulting from the urge to know, for “she found herself falling down what seemed to be a very deep well”, with its sides “filled with cupboards and bookshelves.” Here, the sequential order of things, curiosity, knowledge, and fall is elegantly brought to the fore, as one follows the other in a quite logical sense. This is one of the several things she had learned in her classroom that warned her of the dire consequence of curiosity, a lesson she completely ignores. Fortunately, however, it all ends well for Alice who lands safely and finds herself in the unscrupulous world of Wonderland. This is the very first wonder in the story where the logic of the world above the ground does not hold. There is no physical or psychological punishment awaiting the curious

49. Craton, The Victorian Freak Show..., 185.
little Alice, or she somehow manages to escape it. Nor does she show any real sense of regret for acting upon her curiosity. Even when she feels homesick and says: “I almost wish I hadn’t gone down that rabbit-hole”, she at the same time adds: “and yet – and yet – it’s rather curious, you know, this sort of life!” The message is clear: Alice is bent on liberating herself from the rigid world of adults, and the above-ground code of behaviour which is “wrong from beginning to end” like the verses she tries to recites.

The Victorian cultural ethos, is disturbed by her remaining unharmed and free of remorse throughout her subterranean journey, though not necessarily unmoved. She reinforces the point as she addresses herself thus: “How can you learn lessons in here?... there’s hardly any room for you, and no room at all for any lesson-books.” This resurfaces in her conversation with Mock Turtle. On hearing the Turtle saying that they “had the best of education” and that they “went to school every day”, Alice replies: “I’ve been to a day-school too… you needn’t be proud at all that.” She also brags about the fact that “we learned French and music” as “extras”. Yet when the Mock Turtle asks her if she had learned washing, Alice answers rather indignantly: “Certainly not”, only to be told that hers “wasn’t a really good school.”

The dialogue reflects two different concepts of education derived from two distinct worlds, both of which Alice relates to as much as she finds fault with. This conflicting relationship with the two of them accounts for a perceptible change in her almost overnight. Alice herself senses it as she reflects upon her disposition: “I wonder if I’ve been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I’m not the same, the next question is who in the world am I? She then goes on to say: “I’m sure I’m not Ada”... for her hair goes in such long ringlets, and mine doesn’t go in ringlets at all; and I’m sure I can’t be Mabel, For I know all sorts of things, and she, oh! She knows such a very little!...” It is here that Alice begins to doubt the validity and authenticity of the above-ground set of rules once contrasted with the ambience of Wonderland.

To be sure, what Alice encounters in Wonderland is all a dream, “a curious and wonderful dream”, but one that is a mimetic representation of reality. It comes at a time when the dull reality shows signs of motion under new social impulses. As Nina Auerbach points out: “the world to which Alice awakens seems far more dream-like and hazy than the sharp contours of Wonderland.”

Hence, reality and dream converge and create a situation in which the logic of the conventional world above the ground is called into question, while at the same time the unconventional world of dream is given a logic of its own. This is the lesson learned at the end of Alice’s journey to Wonderland. It speaks to the duality of childhood and adulthood, as embodied in Alice’s complex attitudes: the creatures of Wonderland do not only consist of humans and animals, but they represent “adult and childlike, at times seeming to satirize the rigid and authoritarian personality of the Victorian parent and at other times capering like incorrigible children.” Such a duality is also reflected in Alice’s fragmented personality, which is made up of the opposites, causing her to act “both as a child and as an adult, at times the prim schoolmistress, at other times the chastened schoolgirl.”

This corresponds to Carroll’s own vision of childhood that on the one hand “distanced itself from the idealized, metaphysical, ethical, and didactic approach of Romanticism”, while on the other “[he] rejected the image of the ‘little adult’ popularized by Victorian iconography.” In the light of this duality of character, Alice’s previous identity becomes irrelevant. She is no longer a child of the Victorian era, as she feels different from others. Nor is she an adult in the sense of relinquishing her childlike features. Instead, she oscillates between child and adult as reflected in changes in her size.

The same is true of Alice’s mission, for she is as much a rebellious child trying to subvert the conventional world of adults as she projects the image of a Victorian adult reacting to “the often intensely oral aggressions of wonderland”, “celebrated as a hallmark of the ideal British character.” Viewed in the latter sense, she is the by-product of her own above-ground society that blocks her vision “to perceive Wonderland’s meaning for those

who live by the illusory principles of above-ground order.”61 “It’s really dreadful … the way all the creatures argue”, deplores Alice, despite the fact that “she was getting so well used to queer things happening.” This finds expression in her reluctance to join the creatures of Wonderland, “to go among mad people”, only to be reminded by the Cheshire Cat that “we’re all mad here”: “I’m mad. You’re mad”, or else “you wouldn’t have come here.”62 The remark is crucial for forcing Alice to depart more and more from her conventional thinking, because she becomes “just as subversive towards Wonderland as Wonderland has been towards her and her above-ground principles.”63

Alice’s dual subversion ushers in a new perception of the world, in which it is safer to be with the Gryphon than with the “savage Queen”.64 Like David Copperfield’s philosophical view, the new perspective is a confluence of the past and the present as well as a fusion of the two seemingly opposite worlds of childhood and adulthood. Alice’s incursion to Wonderland is in itself an important event that refashions her as a miniature adult free of modern constraints. At the same time, the event reinforces certain important features of her modern existence as she tries to impose her own inherited notion of order on the host land. Here, the re-enactment of the medieval concept of childhood in light of the liberating potential of modernity is evident. It introduces a new approach to childhood, which is no longer “by way of satanic monstrosity – namely, the golden world of an Edenic wonderland whose pastoral dimension gives it the status of a primal scene.” This meant that children were neither to be seen as the embodiment of original sin, nor original innocence.65 Alice’s active presence in the course of her journey both physically and orally is in fact an important aspect of the story. Not only does it vitiate against the idealized image of childhood and womanhood, but it also defies the Victorian conviction that children were to be seen but not heard. From this perspective, Alice becomes the embodiment of a modern child who is

62. Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 92, 90.
63. Rackin, “Alice’s Journey to the End of Night”, 325.
64. Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 138-139.
cognizant of “both the melancholy of the loss of Eden and the child’s rude and tragic haste to leave its innocence.”

Such an unprejudiced image of the child begins to emerge soon after Alice enters the rabbit hole. To be sure, here Alice emerges as the personification of a modern child subjected to the dictates of a time-regulated society, as symbolized by the White Rabbit wearing a watch and hurriedly going his way. Yet, she is also a child who strongly adheres to her childlike characteristics and playfulness, which leads to “a rediscovery of an old childhood enjoyment”, by pervasively and subversively ridiculing “intelligence, logic, time, and space”. Alice’s reduction of the tragedy of death to a laughing matter is a case in point. Upon confronting the Queen of the Heart in the croquet-ground and hearing her repeated order to behead violators, Alice reflects: “They’re dreadfully fond of beheading people here”, but then she adds with a tone of irony that “the great wonder is, that there’s any one left alive.”

This subversion of Victorian moral precepts and its conventional didacticism is however made possible in Wonderland which is “a world of striking moral laxity” and “an infinitely flexible place that consistently gratifies Alice’s self-indulgence…” It is also a world reminiscent of the medieval times when there was a proximity between humans and animals, and no sharp distinction between the ages and social classes. Throughout her adventure, Alice is accompanied by animals, mixes up with adults and people of high classes, and freely expresses her thoughts and desires. Although for the most part the creatures of Wonderland treat her like a child, she still projects herself on a par with adults, whom she argues with and at times criticizes openly. Alice’s encounter with the Lory at the party of the animals is a high point in the story. She categorically refuses to submit to the Lory’s reasoning when the latter insists: “I am older than you, and must know better”. Alice could also act as an adult by engaging in a critical exchange of words with the Hatter who in turn treats her accordingly. She admonishes him for making “personal remarks”, and when she tells the Hatter “Nobody asked your opinion”, the latter could retort triumphantly by saying:

“Who’s making personal remarks now?” Similarly, she mingles with the power elite and freely and fearlessly confronts them. Alice’s first encounter with the Queen of Hearts is quite noteworthy. In answering the Queen’s query as to who the three gardeners are, she surprises her by impudently responding: “How should I know?”

This example in particular implies more than a mere co-existence of age groups or social classes characteristic of the medieval society. It was an act of defiance against authority figures whom Alice ridicules along with those bowing to their power. Her account of the Fish-Footman who hands over to a Frog-Footman an invitation from the Queen for the Duchess to play croquet is revealing. As the two footmen mentioned the name of the Queen, “they both bowed so low” that “their curls got entangled together.” Alice’s reaction to the scene was to laugh so loud that “she had to run back into the wood for fear of their hearing her, and when she next peeped out the Fish-Footman was gone, and the other was sitting on the ground near the door, staring stupidly up into the sky.”

Similarly, Alice disregarded the Queen herself, who “had only one way of settling all difficulties, great or small: ‘off with his head’.” She ignores this oft-repeated and seemingly terrifying statement. When the furious Queen orders the same sort of punishment for her, the defiant Alice simply utters: “Nonsense!” Here the use of language in so carefree a tone visibly threatens to shatter the above-ground hierarchical order, because the word “nonsense” denotes “the dialectic of lack and excess.” Such a simple but powerful response that is repeated by the Cheshire cat. Alice introduces her cat to the King, who demands that the cat kiss his hand. The cat refuses with a nonchalant: “I’d rather not.” The incensed King reply, “Don’t be.impertinent”, is ineffective, and it is followed by the now comical and equally ineffective remedy of the Queen of Hearts: “Off with his head.” This is especially comic, since only the cat’s head is visible, leaving the executioner to wonder how to “cut off a head from a body.”

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It is noteworthy at this point to see how “art and insurrection”, as William Blackburn put them together, become “quests for freedom”. After all, the unconventional use of language as an artistic device to defy authority has a liberating potential. If the figure of speech can be used as a form of rebellion against the power elite, it can equally target the scientific misconception that conceals power relations. In this respect, Lewis Carroll, in much the same way as Charles Dickens and George MacDonald, unravels new trends in scientific inquiries by simply introducing elements from humanities into physiology. Alice’s account of the changing temperament of the Duchess is a case in point. This is part of the moral of the story, as indicted by the latter’s own admission: “Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it.” During temper trauma in her household, the Duchess gets so violently angry that she begins throwing frying pans at her cook. The act is attributed to her consumption of pepper, which is wrong since she never acts in the same manner in the company of the Queen of the Heats on the croquet ground. As is made clear, the contrast has more to do with power relations than a change in the temperament induced by pepper. This is, at least, the impression that Alice gives us in her pictorial and comical representation of the power elite who only lose temper when dealing with their social inferiors.

Perhaps more crucial is Alice’s realization that the royal power issues not so much from blood as from a set of social relations. For this reason, their power is neither sacred nor legitimate, which prompts her to perceive them as essentially vacuous, leading to her frequent comment on the King and the Queen of Hearts: “…they’re only a pack of cards after all. I needn’t be afraid of them!” It gives Alice the courage to tell the Queen right to her face: “Who cares for you… You’re a pack of cards.” Here, the state of being fearless corresponds with the experience of growing in size. The experience is repeated in similar situations as during the court proceedings towards the end of the story. Acting almost as a lawyer for the Knave, Alice dismisses as evidence an unsigned letter attributed to the accused, thus contradicting the King and the Queen by declaring: “It proves nothing of the sort…Why, you don’t even know what they’re about.” When the King insists that the letter in itself constitutes “the most important piece of evidence we’ve heard yet” after ordering the White Rabbit to read it entirely, Alice still is not convinced. “If any of them [the jury]...
can explain it”, she challenges, “I’ll give him sixpence”, since she does not concede that “there’s an atom of meaning in it.” While making her argument, Alice notices that “she had grown so large in the last few minutes that she wasn’t a bit afraid of interrupting him [the King].” A similar situation had occurred earlier when, overwhelmed by curiosity, she had drunk from “the little magic bottle” near the looking glass. Thereupon she grew “a thousand times as large as the Rabbit, and had no reason to be afraid of it.”

Alice’s physical enlargement as a mark of her assertiveness and will power could not go unnoticed. It had already captured the King’s attention, for even before the court proceedings, he had ordered Alice to leave the courtroom because of her unusual height. Calling it “Rule Forty- two”, the King announced: “All persons more than a mile high to leave the court.” Alice refused to obey the rule even after the King announced her as being: “Nearly two miles high.” She exposed the vacuity of the power elite and revealed her own capacity to assert her rights by challenging convention. “Well, I shan’t go, at any rate”, says Alice, claiming that such a rule is “not a regular rule: you invented it just now.” Even when the King declares it “the oldest rule in the book”, Alice retorts by demanding that “[t]hen it ought to be Number one”, a response that forces the King to retract.

It is equally noteworthy that the power elite admit to the inequality of individuals before the law. When the mad Hatter was accused of stealing and begs for mercy on the ground that he is “a poor man”, the King retorts: “You’re a very poor speaker”\textsuperscript{74} The Hatter is apparently guilty as charged, simply because he lacks the power of speech to argue in his own defence. This was reminiscent of an ancient argument against social and cultural inferiors who could not comprehend Latin as the language used in European courts.\textsuperscript{75}

However, from a child’s perspective, the shattering of the above-ground rules and regulations is tantamount to the subversion of the conventional world of adults. After all, to Alice the King and the Queen of Hearts appear as mere adults, notwithstanding their enormous power over the creatures of Wonderland. This is why Alice first and foremost

\textsuperscript{74} Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 187, 182, 44-47, 180, 172.
\textsuperscript{75} This is reminiscent of what Menocchio, the sixteenth-century blasphemous miller from Montereale, Italy said during his trial by the inquisitors: “I think speaking Latin is a betrayal of the poor because in lawsuits the poor do not know what is being said and are crushed; and if they want to say four words they need a lawyer.”, See Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1982), 9.
assumes the role of breaking free of such an inhibiting world, of championing their rights and empowering them to assert themselves. As Elsie Leach points out:

In the guise of dream fantasy, Alice states the plight of a little girl in an adult world. Throughout the book Dodgson [Lewis Carroll] describes sympathetically the child’s feelings of frustration at the illogical ways of adults- their ponderous didacticism, and contradictory behaviour … The underlying message of Alice, then, is a rejection of adult authority, a vindication of the rights of children, even the right of the child to self-assertion.76

By the same token, the child hero in Lewis Carroll ‘s literary work is also endowed with the potential to liberate adults from their inner prison, a culturally and spiritually enclosed world, from which there was otherwise no easy escape. He entrusts Alice with such a task, which is done by the dual performance of acting as both a child and an adult. While in the former capacity she appears as a medieval child in a modern environment, in the latter she assumes the role of an adult with childlike qualities. These dual adult-child attributes assigned to the person of Alice aims at breaking the adult-child dichotomy and is the prime message conveyed at the closing of the novel:

Lastly, she [Alice’s sister] pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood: and how she would gather about her other little children, and make their eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long-ago: and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days.77

It is worth noting that throughout the story, Alice appears as an asexual character who not only defies social conventions shows complete disregard for gender rules. She is therefore doubly resistant to the prescriptions in the Grimms’ patriarchal model of

76. Leach, “Alice in Wonderland in Perspective”, 92.
77. Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 192.
socialization which inherently identifies childhood with girlhood. This is a theme that comes to the surface in George MacDonald’s 1891 story, “The Light Princess”. To be sure, the story features the role of gender in the dual oppression of female children at an early age, but it also conveys the success story of a female character who breaks free of her sexual inhibition as she begins to regain her feminine identity.

Let us now turn to the story as it unfolds. A princess is bewitched at birth by her paternal aunt, Princess Makemnoit, who the King had forgotten to invite to the new-born’s christening ceremony. The vengeful aunt attends the ceremony only to suspend the laws of gravity, causing the little princess to float in the air. This practically transforms her into an asexual celestial being, devoid of desire and alien to worldly pleasures. She is alienated from her social milieu as manifested in her outlandish behaviour and lack of emotion as she was neither serious nor sad nor happy about anything.78

What follows next is an attempt by MacDonald to expose Victorian repressiveness, with consequences for the female body, commonly perceived as an infirmity. He goes on to critique the dominant culture, adding not only a feminine dimension to the concept of childhood, but also redeeming women by subverting “manly figures.” In doing so, he challenges “the prevailing view of the sexes” and “allows his female characters agency”, without openly “moving beyond his culture’s norms for men and women in his presentation of both sexes.”79 Such empowering of female characters in MacDonald’s literary works corresponds to a gender-neutral mode of socialization as well as a new scientific worldview that introduces a new approach to the anatomy of the human psyche.

The King’s quest for a cure to the Princess’s malaise was necessarily informed by the contemporary cultural orientation and scientific understanding the human mind and body, especially of a child and a woman. Both the Chinese philosophers whom the King summons to treat the princess’s infirmity fail to find a cure, much to his chagrin. The two philosophers, Hum-Drum and Kopy-Keck, who were “materialist” and “spiritualist”

respectively, and knowledgeable in their own fields, represented a knowledge system that was incapable of comprehending modern ailments. Kopy-Keck is ostensibly right when he finds no “fault in the princess, body or soul”, except that “the motion of her heart has been reversed… running the wrong way through all her corporal organism…” His remedy is to phlebotomize her “until she is reduced to the last point of safety.” Equally plausible - but equally inane - is the diagnosis rendered by Hum-Drum, who believes that the Princess’s soul may have gone so “far astray” that “[s]he does not belong by rights to this world at all, but to some other planet, probably Mercury.” He recommends that the princess “must therefore be taught, by the sternest compulsion, to take an interest in the earth as the earth”, which would entail a multi-disciplinary study of the earth and its origin.80

The refusal by the royal parents to comply with either remedy is revealing. It expresses their anxiety over subjecting their offspring to “the schemes of the equally unscrupulous philosophers”; but it also reflects their conviction that “the most complete knowledge of the laws of nature would have been unserviceable in her case; for it was impossible to classify her.” This alone signals a subtle reversal of the nineteenth century positivist view of science in favour of a more humanist approach. Such new directions of inquiry later appears in Freudian psychoanalysis, adding a new dimension to the concept of childhood.

Viewed from this perspective, “The Light Princess” is not so much a critique of the Victorian culture as it is a departure from it. Its central theme revolves around the concept of romantic/erotic love, which is both therapeutic and liberating, if only one could see clearly as if looking through water. The element of water becomes crucial to the sensual experience of love, for unless the princess is immersed in it, “she did not even know that there was such a beehive of honey and stings to be fallen into.” This is the moment of consciousness, the moment when the princess throws herself into the lake water, whereupon “she recovered the natural right of which she had been so wickedly deprived, namely gravity.” Here, the effect of water on the princess’s soul as a means of “conveying” her “injury” is apparent, although MacDonald falls short of seeing the correlation in absolute terms, which itself is a departure

from the prevailing scientific worldview. Her attitude toward life alters, as plunging into the water helps revitalize her passion for life. A wandering prince falls in love with the princess and joins her in the lake, and her awareness peaks when she realizes what she had been deprived of all along, namely gravity and passionate love. As the story goes:

… when he [the prince] began to talk to her about love, she always turned her head towards him and laughed. After a while she began to looked puzzled, as if she were trying to understand what he meant, but could not – revealing a notion that he meant something. But as soon as ever she left the lake, she was so altered, that the prince said to himself, “If I marry her, I see no help for it: we must turn merman and mermaid, and go out to the sea at once.”

Hence, if the power and transparency of water as metaphor for intellectual clarity made the princess conscious of her lost emotions, the power of romantic/erotic love helped revive them, thus enabling her to resume her worldly existence. So powerful is the effect of water and so everlasting is the sensual experience of love that when the vicious aunt completely drains the lake, the princess does everything to restore it. For water is her source of discovering love and passion for life, such that “she felt as if the lake were her soul, drying up within her, first to mud, then to madness, and death.” But it turns out that embracing death was the only way of bringing water into the lake, as indicated on a gold plate found in a deep rocky basin in the middle of the dried lake. It read:

Death alone from death can save.
Love is death, and so is brave
Love can fill the deepest grave.
Love loves on beneath the water.

This means a great sacrifice on the part of the prince, who would have to “give himself of his own will”, by using his “living body” against the hole at the bottom of the lake.

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81 MacDonald, *The Light Princess* ..., 68.
82 MacDonald, *The Light Princess* ..., 80.
83 MacDonald, *The Light Princess* ..., 81.
in order to “stanch the flow” of water. While he does so out of love for the princess, the latter sits in a boat and keeps feeding him with bread and wine, until the water rises above his head, at which point “the princess gave a shriek, and sprang into the lake”, trying to pull and tug him. She feels exhausted and breathless in her effort, but “[l]ove and water brought back all her strength”, enabling her to get him out of the water and place him in the boat.

Although the prince has ceased to breathe with the princess shedding tears over his body, once in her bed, he opens his eyes, calling out loud to her: “If you have come round, princess, so have I.” This was almost a magical response to the words uttered by the princess’ old nurse: “My darling child! She’s found her gravity.” Love restores gravity to the princess, evident from the manner in which the prince defines gravity. Rejecting the princess’ notion of gravity as being a cumbersome experience, “he took her up, and carried her about like a baby, kissing her all the time”, and telling her: “This is gravity.”

The story ends with MacDonald outlining a new mode of socialization, along with a new concept of childhood that embraced children’s sexuality. The princess reverts to the state of childhood the moment she finds her gravity. Like a little child, she is yet to learn the unfamiliar act of walking, something she had never experienced before. This is an arduous task that would take a long time to learn, “for she walked no more than a baby.” In reality, the princess is a child who is reborn into this planet and is entitled to partake in all its worldly desires and pleasures without being subjected to repressive measures. The ability to walk is then a metaphor for self-assertion by the future generations of children, especially young girls, to break free of the chains of sexual repression, the spell cast on them at early childhood. Here, the seeds of revolt against the discourse of sexuality emanating from within the power structure of modern capitalism is sown, a phenomenon which is manifested in the illustrations to the subsequent publications of “The Light Princess”. Suffice it to draw a comparison between the novel’s initial appearance in 1864 under the title, *Adela Cathcart*, and its 1926 and 1962 editions, illustrated by Dorothy P. Lathrop and William Pene Du Bois respectively. Although the subject of sex is self-evident in all the versions, the manner of its presentation as well as the novel’s target audience differ considerably. Whereas in its first

84. MacDonald, The Light Princess…, 99-105.
85. MacDonald, The Light Princess ..., 82, 99-100, 103, 105.
appearance, the novel lacked pictorial illustrations altogether so as to conceal the sexual intimacy between the prince and the princess despite the audience being predominantly adult, in the latter editions, the novel is unmistakably addressed to the young reader who is exposed to the scenes of sexual intimacy as the two lovers are shown kissing in the serenity of stilled lake water.86

**The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**

Our story of childhood may not be complete without including the concept of adolescence as both a by-product and dynamic force of modernity. It is consistent with the commonly held view that the magical effect of the fairyland on children ceases to exist once they pass age ten, and with this comes the rebellious adolescent, who then acts out what he/she had only been imagining as a child. While the child formulates the alternative, the adolescent takes it upon itself to enact it. The latter not only dislodges an age-segregated society, which is predominantly adult-oriented, but also frees childhood from its metaphor of oppression. It reinvents a philosophically charged concept of childhood and places it at the centre of the adult-child economy in which such attributes as spontaneity and naturalness no longer belong exclusively to childhood, but may equally be extended to adulthood.

As previously noted, the socialization of children began by their identifying with the main protagonist of the story and how, fired by their imagination, this identification could turn the adult world upside down. This is therapeutically important for children, who often reconstruct the world in accordance with their constantly changing dreamland, thereby confronting their repressed childhood in a constructive manner. Such an experience can only be achieved through the act of identification in fairy tales, especially as their narratives undergo a radical change. It is no wonder that “[c]hildren who are deprived of the tale by force will sooner or later suffer from the consequences”. They may fall prey to “the mystic cults and irrational sects” which “take their victims from among those who substituted childhood vision with the rationalism of adult society much too early.”87 This inevitably directs us to a different genre, the novel, which offers a healthy ambience within which

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87 Dégh, “Grimms’ Household Tales and Its Place in the Household…”, 100.
fantasy and imagination flourish against violence. Novels function just as another form of fairy tale for a particular age group beyond target-audience for fairy tales, including adults, who re-experience the magical effect of their lost fairyland through an entirely different path.

Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) is the most influential novel of this sort. It presents a critical view of the adult world as seen through the eyes of an adolescent who vacillates between a child and an adult, as he discards one set of qualities to adopt another. Huck “must steal from the adult world the power, but also the fun, he needs to keep feeling like a boy.” The change of character is circumstantial, intended rather unconsciously to project an alternative concept of childhood, which ensures his freedom from social constraints.

The novel also features the experience of an adolescent in a world which is increasingly staged by the moral and cultural imperatives of the dominant classes. The strict socialization to which he is subjected at Widow Douglas’ home is a microcosm and symbolic manifestation of the subordination of popular classes to the elite culture. Huck is a parentless child of poverty. We hear nothing of his mother as if she does not exist, but we do hear from his absent father, who is a social outcast living a shoddy life in a cabin, and who appears from time to time only to reproach his son for being ‘dandy’, going to school. Huck definitely shares aspects of the dominant culture through his socialization at an early age, but he is also emotionally drawn to the world of his father which is quite apart from the one he lives in. He is torn between the laxity and carefree mentality of the pre-modern era on the one hand, and the strictures and regularity of the modern world on the other. He does not wish to remain in the rigid environment of Miss Watson’s house, nor is his father’s cabin an ideal place to return to. His only solution then is to escape from both settings in search of an alternative.

Under the guardianship of Widow Douglas and her sister Miss Watson, Huck’s status is reduced to that of a child. His daily life in the Widow’s house was monotonous and conventional; the bell rang for supper; and Miss Watson’s tone was sardonic. As Huck reminisces, “Miss Watson would say: Don’t put your feet up there Huckleberry; don’t scrunch up like that, Huckleberry Finn—set up straight; …Don’t gap and stretch like that,

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Huckleberry—why don’t you try to behave?” Miss Watson’s “sivilizing” efforts to reform Huck clearly define his identity both as a child in need of discipline and a pre-civilized entity in need of civility. Huck’s refusal to succumb to the dual identity is symptomatic of a growing resistance to the prevailing notion of civilization, which was oppressive and exclusionary.

The resistance takes the form of an elusive response to Miss Watson’s didactic and moralizing presence, which corresponds to the protagonist’s “unmediated, precivilised imagination.” As Huck recollects, “she [Miss Watson] told me all about bad places, and I said I wished I was there.” After all, he wanted a change, a change that “is not only in space, but also in time, an escape from the present time’s imprisonment in boredom and regularity.” This escape from time is flight from civilisation, a flight that begins with Huck’s exchange of Miss Watson’s “tongue lashing” for the “rowhide whippings of a dreadful and abusive father.” There in the “pap’s” cabin he endures physical confinement for a lengthy periods, yet it was still a place of freedom from the orderly world of convention. He no longer wishes to return to the widow’s house and “be so cramped up and sivilized.” He indeed wonders how he had ever “got to like it so well at the widow’s, where you had to wash, and eat on a plate, and comb up, and go to bed and get up regular, and be forever bothered over a book…”

Ultimately, Huck’s escape from the “pap’s” cabin opens the path to his freedom, not only from the world of adult convention and artifice, but also from the superstitious domain of his father. Huck’s changing perception of time is expressed through “an incessant ‘clock’ that flows ceaselessly throughout the novel: the river [Mississippi River]”, his redemption through the “natural” as against the “metaphorical” clock. Huck’s narrative of the events with a precise reckoning of time sequence is the result of his flight from the pressures of civilized society. It speaks to his emancipated self that dissociates itself from

92. Wayne Fields, “When the Fences are Down; Language and Order in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*”, *Journal of American Studies* 24, no. 3 (December 1990): 375.
childhood as a discourse of domination and begins the search for a new identity. This is accomplished, “in the mobile world of the river” where “one can invent one’s identity at will.”

Joined by the runaway slave, Jim, on the river, the liberated Huck casts aside his earlier existence as an object of dependency and regulation to assume adult characteristics. Yet, in doing so, he does not entirely relinquish his inner childhood traits. On the contrary, his transformation into an adult-like character strengthens in him such childlike attributes as spontaneity, autonomy and ingenuity, attributes which speak of “the modern imagination of autonomy and delight, of surprise and elevation, of selves conceived in opposition to the general culture.”

Huck is neither a child nor an adult, but, rather, the constructed image of a free adult-child personage which stands in contradistinction to the repressed and encapsulated adult/child of the civilized world. The contrast is for the most part articulated in “the polar opposition between the River and the Shore.” While the Shore represents a general state of mendacity, concealment, and conventionality, symmetrical with the ideology of slavery itself, the River conveys the prospect of redemption from bondage.

This observation is especially true of Jim, his black male companion whose effort to break free of his confinement imbues him with similar qualities. He, too, performs the role of an adult-child character, one that artfully manipulates the child within Huck. Yet owing to his enslaved status, Jim is as powerless as a child. That a child and a runaway slave come into contact in their common quest for personal freedom is no coincidence, but a token of Mark Twain’s ingenious creation to underscore the ideological affinity between childhood and bondage. The two concepts, as seen in the southern tradition of treating adult black males as children, and the Victorian/Puritan view of children as enslaved creatures, entail servitude in both a metaphorical and real sense. Each sees his own freedom as being dependent on that of the other. This is definitely true of Jim whose escape from servitude rests on Huck’s sympathetic attitude towards his predicament. The same is true of Huck, who “in freeing Jim from bondage”, also attempts “to free himself from the enslaving voice of his southern

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socialization.” As John Alberti states: “In helping Jim, Huck at the same time is trying to avoid becoming a ‘nigger’ himself.” Consequently, Mark Twain’s perception of Huck’s and Jim’s plight “is that of every man, and their quest for a universal human undertaking.”

Such an attitude of self-autonomy characteristic of life on the river finds expression in the triumph of Huck’s free will over the restraining influence of the community. This is the resolution to a conflict that tears him apart, between what Mark Twain himself called “a sound heart and a deformed conscience.” The conflict comes into full view when he encounters a moral dilemma over whether or not to let Jim down. Huck’s inclination to do so is part of his acquired conscience that still operates within him. While he is free as an individual, he still carries with him the freight of the dominant culture and its racial bias. Huck’s conscience begins to haunt him as Jim perceptibly imagines the prospect of freedom on the way towards their final destination at Cairo. He is overwhelmed by an intense feeling of guilt and remorse for helping out a runaway “nigger”.

I tried to make out to myself that I wasn’t to blame, because I didn’t run Jim off from his rightful owner, but it wasn’t no use, conscience up and says, every time, “But you knowed he was running for his freedom, and you could a paddled ashore and told somebody.” That was so- I couldn’t get around that, no way. That was where it pinched.

He harbours contempt towards Jim, a facet of Huck’s racial prejudice against the imagined emancipation of a “nigger”. He recalls the old saying: “give a nigger an inch and he’ll take an ell.” He condescendingly apologizes to Jim for his practical joke: “I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger…” His praise of Jim’s intelligence almost denies it: “he had an uncommon level head for a nigger.” Remarks of this kind certainly show Huck’s immersion in the world of white supremacy, which accounts for a sudden

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98. Allingham, “Patterns of Deception…”, 469.
100. Smith, “Introduction”, xii.
101. Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Xvi.
102. Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, 75.
reversal of his feelings and preparation to betray his black male companion. Such racial asymmetry could divide the two companions. Huck's artfulness and ingenuity come into conflict with Jim’s superstition and naivety, which could transfer the image of innocence from Huck to Jim.

Nevertheless, Huck’s peripheral existence as a child of poverty inevitably leads him to ally with the runaway “nigger”. Because both the racially oppressed and underclass are relegated to the realm of marginality, a shared oppression that deploys them against the power elite. Huck’s disapproval of Jim’s escape does not make him a moral advocate of the established order. After all, he is the son of a poverty-stricken and ill-spoken man with a shadowy existence who indulges in acts of petty theft to make ends meet. “Pap always said it warn’t no harm to borrow things, if you was meaning to pay them back, sometime”, recounts Huck, but also recalls the saying by Ms. Watson that “it warn’t anything but a soft name for stealing…”103 He, too, like the father, unhygienic and inarticulate, would do the same. He steals corns, watermelons, muskmelons, and pumpkin, and lives the life of a vagabond, with a talent for lies and subterfuge. Challenging as they are to the standard moral virtues and practices, such acts, seen from a broader perspective, constitute Huck’s “innocence and purity”104, in a social world governed by property rights as opposed to human rights.

Therein lies the reason for his empathy to a black male adult who has perpetrated ‘the immoral act’ of running away from “his rightful master”, but with whom he shares things in common. To surrender Jim, Huck may “secure his white status and clarify his own position as a non-slave.”105 But to do this, when he himself is negligent of the moral virtues of the white community, would implicate him in an act of hypocrisy to which he does not wish to commit himself. “All right, then, I’ll go to hell”, so declared Huck.106

This triumph of independent moral judgement over acquired conscience is a sign of inner freedom that allows Huck to free himself from the shackles of the Victorian morality. But this could hardly endow him with a vision to formulate an alternative view of

the adult-child relationship in an egalitarian mould. Unlike Alice, Huck is a poverty-stricken adolescent with an inferior social status that precludes him from asserting himself as a rebellious force against the inequality of the ages. Throughout the novel, there is no indication of Huck demanding the same kind of respect that is extended to adults, although he very much acts like one. The Phelps family and later the King and Duke, all treat him like a child, to which he shows little sign of resentment. Ultimately, when he is reintegrated into the shore culture in the custody of Aunt Salley, Tom Sawyer’s aunt, he ceases to act like an adult.

Viewed in this context, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, with all its outlandish features and subtleties, is a response to the Victorian/Puritan culture and a departure from its repressive mode of socialization, which denies the child’s special character. Huck certainly finds a more relaxing environment for his upbringing in the convivial ambience of Aunt Salley’s home, where he is no longer bound by excessive rules and regulations and no bell ringing for supper. In this sense, his escape ends up with his relative freedom, but he still has a long way to go in order to be treated on a par with adults. This is because the historical context within which such an egalitarian view of the adult-child relationship could be articulated had not been fully present. Perhaps R. J. Fertel’s remark on Huck’s failure to grow up should be reversed, as it was society much more than Huck himself that was not ready for “the journey to maturity”.

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Conclusion

The popular evocation of the young Mozart as the paragon of a child prodigy in art as in culture derives from the conception of the child genius as a rare occurrence attributable only to exceptional children. It serves the culture industry and reflects the Victorian/Romantic concept of childhood that denied children their full-fledged intellectual growth. This is not to deny individual differences in talent and aptitude, but only to stress that this particular view of childhood worked indiscriminately against all children. At the heart of it lay the image of the innocent child in need of moral protection. It enclosed children within an age-graded system of learning, impermeable to insights from the wider world.

Surely, childhood as a modern invention predates Mozart, but its full adverse effect was yet to be felt in the nineteenth century with the spread of literacy and mass education. Mozart and his contemporaries did not have to face modern socialization methods. Nor did the other outstanding figures who followed, thanks in large measure to parental commitment and determination. These remarkable cases have led us to think of individual talent as the exception rather than the rule, marketed as a commodity in a world of exceptions. But exceptions of this sort are remnants of a vanished past which was drastically altered by the historical mutations of the era known to us as modernity. If so, the modern obsession with child prodigy may just be a nostalgic return to a past when each child was a genius in his or her own way.

This shift of attitudes to childhood is part of a wider change in our perception of the world which may be discerned in the writing and re-writing of fairy tales. For one thing, the fairy tale is the mimetic representation of epochal changes in general, and the vicissitudes of childhood in particular. As a distinctly secular genre, it has echoed and responded to the most pressing mundane issues of the time since its inception in the Renaissance. The works of early writers, notably Giovan Straparola and Madam d’Aulnoy represent the dawn of a new society and culture offering that upward social mobility. Such a prospect would have been inconceivable in the pre-modern era, given the immutability of the hierarchical order, as in fact reflected in the earlier fables of Marie de France.
This secular aspect of the genre constitutes its defining feature that has remained constant throughout, notwithstanding its shift of emphasis. But if Straparola’s *La Piacevoli Notte* reflected a changing material world, and d’Aulnoy’s *Contes de fées* its moral and cultural standards, Charles Perrault’s *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* served as a grand socializing scheme in accordance with the civilizing process and the imperatives of the absolutist state. The latter’s effort in both directions proved to be a landmark in the history of the fairy tale. While Perrault’s moral and cultural benchmark laid the foundation for a modernized patriarchal system, his psychogenetic exertions on young children irreversibly shifted the secular focus of the genre to childhood. Henceforth, childhood as a concept with its pervasive notion of innocence gained currency and entered modern sensibility.

This meant that the image of the medieval child as a miniature adult with the qualities of a prodigy would have to be erased from memory. The trend was set with the growing dominance of print over oral culture. By refashioning learning as biologically determined, it deprived children of access to certain forms of knowledge which were now exclusively reserved for adults. This mutation went hand in hand with the adult depiction of children as socially inadequate, thereby denying their imaginative and creative power. At the same time, the repression of their childlike characteristics, so essential to their overall growth, constituted yet another impediment to their intellectual assertion.

A glance at the trajectory of the fairy tale from Perrault to the Brothers Grimm corroborates the point. They both subscribe to a pedagogy of restricting children’s exploration of their environment and projecting them as objects to live up to adult expectations, with no desire or will of their own. In the Grimms’ case, children bore the added burden of representing natural purity and, with it, cultural authenticity for an emerging nation in search of identity. Not surprisingly, the Romantic view of the child in the Grimms’ fairy tales was in some fashion another variant of the Victorian representation of childhood. It, too, shared a repressive attitude toward children, overburdening them with innocence and thereby reducing them to objects of systematic discipline. In fact, the threat of physical and psychological violence used against children as a disciplinary measure since Perrault’s time was intensified in the Grimms’ fairy tales. This constituted a dual strategy of monitoring children since the Grimm Brothers simultaneously erased any reference to sex, lest it compromise their innocence. Just as attribution of virtue to women was part of a moral
discourse governing the female body, so was the notion of innocence with respect to children. It, too, served as an effective means of controlling children’s mind and soul by portraying them as asexual, which suggested social inadequacy.

But at this particular juncture, there was a turning point in the history of childhood, as the image of the innocent child turned subversive. The contradiction inherent in the Romantic view of childhood played a considerable role in this reorientation. If its exalted image of the child as a symbol of purity was overwhelmingly oppressive, the opposed image of the child as the embodiment of a particular realm of knowledge proved redemptive. This was a revolutionary consequence of nineteenth century Romanticism that recognized the self in an active and sensual relationship with the natural world. Not only did it create a cultural context for being receptive to children’s expression of desire, but it also entrusted the child with a mission to redeem women and the entire spectrum of the socially marginalized.

This is what inspired many writers of the late Victorian era whose narratives spoke to the child within, tortured and oppressed, but rebellious without. In doing so, they embark on a historical journey to one’s distant past through self-dramatization in the persona of the child protagonist. The works of Charles Dickens, George MacDonald, and Lewis Carroll are particularly relevant as they contested the fundamental assumptions on which the Romantic/Victorian concept of childhood rested. They sought to reverse the concept by setting free the repressed child within, while at the same time introducing the medieval child into a new era of critical thought. Charles Dickens’ “favourite child”, David Copperfield, is the embodiment of this resurrected child-adult character, who acts like a child and thinks like an adult. He is also a child labourer forced into maturity and yet displaying childlike qualities with middle class aspirations. In a word, Dickens’s fictional child hero is the synthesis of both the medieval and modern worlds in a hitherto unimaginable but potentially subversive way.

George MacDonald’s child hero, on the other hand, reacts to what was overwhelmingly perceived as the Victorian identification of childhood with girlhood. The more pervasive application of childhood innocence to female children had created such a gendered view of childhood that transposed the brunt of sexual repression onto women. Hence, MacDonald’s child hero is essentially a female character who makes a strong appearance in “The Light Princess”, struggling to regain her earthly existence. She does so
by re-experiencing her lost sensuality as she immerses herself in the clear water that gives her the power to overcome the repressed part of herself.

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, there is a close relationship between Lewis Carroll, the author, and his own experience as a repressed child that resurfaces in the curiously subversive Alice. Here, Carroll presents a female child whose active social presence runs counter to the Victorian morality, while her fusion of the medieval and modern characteristics leads her to an alternative vision of the world which is both receptive to and critical of the two worlds. Alice casts off her innocence and shows curiosity to explore the world underground in a manner that defies the false logic of the one above. Though a female child protagonist, she is much like Dickens’ child hero who mingles with adults and challenges the power elite from a child’s perspective in ways, which are deemed subversive. In a word, Alice turns upside down the orderly world of adults, but in doing so, she also arrives at a philosophical view of modernity, which is as much modern as it is inspired by historical consciousness.

With the discovery of the unconscious, the movement took a new turn. It had a lasting impact on the Cobra artists of the early twentieth century whose artistic mode of expression was heavily inspired by the playful and creative child that dwelled in them. The result was an emerging philosophical view of childhood rooted in the new concept of adult-child economy that in turn contributed to the democratization of history. Within this context, the notion of the child as possessing agency rather than being objects of history now gained currency, a trend that especially found expression in a new direction in historiography.

Yet, childhood as a concept was not solely confined to children. It also served as a metaphor of oppression, a language of reproach and refusal, extending to a whole spectrum of adults. Not only did its belittling connotation set the tone for the exclusion of women from the public sphere, but it also brought about the cultural and ideological subjugation of the underclass, the unlettered, and the colonized, who were deemed an impediment to the predominantly male-elite culture. At issue were their eccentric traits, originating from their association with oral culture that stood in sharp contrast to the print culture of the ruling elite. The suppression of women’s voice as both the embodiment and conveyor of oral culture was particularly instrumental in suppressing the subordinate and socially marginalized groups.
Above all, it relegated the entire culture to the margins, a process that led to the establishment of bourgeois culture masquerading as a unifying national ideology.

Thus, the shift from classical to modern fairy tale was marked by monopoly by male writers who interposed facets of a male dominated culture into the story line. Again, Charles Perrault was the pioneer in this regard. His mixture of Christian and secular dispositions set the context for a modern patriarchal system within which fairy tales were written and became an increasingly male/elite enterprise. Hence, beginning with Perrault, authors of the fairy tale carried the dual mission of promoting the patriarchal values and disseminating bourgeois moral and cultural norms, both consistent with the elite project of reducing oral popular culture to silence.

Such was the outcome of a long, drawn-out conflict between the popular classes and the power elite in which the latter prevailed ideologically. The full-fledged rise of modern nation-states in the nineteenth century was in many ways symbolized this victory that established bourgeois cultural and political hegemony over the entire society. Through myth and legend, it reconstituted a sense of unity in a nation divided across class, race, and religion. Especially compelling was the dissemination of new sets of norms and values through the magical power of fairy tales, as they were written and re-written to address contemporary issues. What is more, the issues were raised within the metaphorical framework of childhood as a symbol of cultural and moral purity.

The Grimms’ *Children’s and Household Tales* heralds the coming of this shift. It advocates social change in Germany during its most tumultuous time, with a wide appeal throughout the Western world and beyond. The *Tales* captured issues pertaining to the essential features of the modern nation-state, reminding individual citizens of the need to fulfil their civic obligations, a message communicated in a simple but persuasive language. Politeness, civility, honesty, perseverance, moral virtue, and respect for authorities, which had been promoted by Charles Perrault more than one century earlier, now became important ingredients of German culture and correspondingly the underlying principles of bourgeois order. What had changed however was the enlargement of the concept of nation that necessitated the extension of these cultural values and moral principles to all of society, including the underclass. This betokened a significant shift in Europe’s socio-cultural landscape, aided by the spread of the print culture and shaped by the socializing effect of the
fairy tale. For, if the adoption of the dominant culture by the socially eccentric groups of people was the goal, fairy tales proved to be the surest way of achieving it.

Equally persuasive in the Grimms’ tales was the idea that the state for its part should discharge its obligation to its citizens. This is a recurring theme that appears in their less commonly known tales where they throw into sharp relief the state’s indifference to matters of public interest. To liberals like the Grimms, the question had to do with upholding national unity, especially at the time when labour unrest had divided many parts of Europe across social classes. Here, the Grimms’ tacit but compelling argument that the state should take initiative in such matters prefigured the welfare state of the twentieth century in the West.

Nonetheless, bourgeois cultural and moral sensibilities eroded oral/popular culture, renewing the submission of the subordinate classes. This process was facilitated by the spread of the print culture, the very medium of communication within which the fairy tale had emerged and shaped popular minds. From this perspective, the expansion of the bourgeois cultural hegemony over the entire society was not merely a matter of coercion, but the result of the internalization of the dominant culture and ideology by the humble as an indispensable means of upward social mobility.

This was an important historical event for two reasons: first, because the nostalgia for the past culture gave birth to the field of folkloric studies, and second, because the erosion of oral/popular culture deprived the subordinate classes of a critical medium of communication, historically employed to counter the ruling elite. What followed in due course was its substitution with a more innocuous culture which was manufactured and promoted from above. While the new culture for the most part did not embrace the elite’s cultural modality, artistic taste, and sense of aesthetics, it shared their cultural norms and moral values. From the elite’s perspective, this was an ideal situation, as they succeeded in establishing their cultural, ideological, and political hegemony over society without forsaking their privileged position. As for the masses, they were awarded the status of individual citizens with certain provisions for their educational improvement.

Thus, in the contemporary world a good citizen is consumerist, always subservient to the established order, and never hesitant to use the language and logic of the power elite. In like fashion, s/he is uncritically receptive to the cultural dictates of the ruling class to the
extent of internalizing and reproducing them as the ingredients of a mass-originated culture. Accordingly, the nostalgia for times past has given incentives to the intellectual elite to commercialize or rather decontextualize aspects of oral/popular culture in an attempt to make the mass culture more appealing.

To perpetuate the situation, a new mode of socialization has been construed, concurrent with the global capitalist agenda that aims at reproducing the prevailing mass culture. It operates at two different levels. On the one hand, it treats children as liberated individuals with a mind-set of their own, while on the other limiting their knowledge of the world by indirectly discouraging them from developing their intellectual faculties. This is especially seen in the steady transformation of the mass media into entertainment industry, which is replacing what was once perceived as culture industry. The transformation has cast so powerful a spell on children that does allow them to engage in any critical thinking. This is best represented in a non-interventionist attitude toward children’s intellectual growth that interprets almost any pressure on them to learn art and culture as being tantamount to a form of child abuse.

The position has in fact found expression in an educational discourse that focuses primarily on children themselves, thereby dismissing parental role as inconsequential. Such a discourse has inadvertently prevented children from exercising their experimental realm of knowledge, just as the Disney’s pictorial domination of fairy tales adversely affected their power of imagination. The result has been to perpetuate the notion of exceptionality characterizing our modern world, as there are still purported cases of child prodigy arising from such factors as family environment, social background, and of course the child’s own aptitude and disposition.

Hence, the real problem is no longer the child’s lack of exposure to sources of knowledge. Rather, it is his/her placement within a culturally and intellectually non-conducive environment, one in which the desire to learn has given way to the urge for entertainment. This is reflective not only of the new mode of socialization, but also of our Brave New World that intends, among other things, to reproduce a mass culture, which is both uncritical of and subservient to the ruling elite. It is no surprise then that public interest in fairy tales has diminished considerably, thus rendering irrelevant Albert Einstein’s advice
to parents that they should read more and even more fairy tales to their children as the most effective means of ensuring intellectual achievement.

All this shows that the civilizing process that in the course of the last several centuries unleashed the liberating potential of modernity is in need of redirection. For the recent direction that it has taken is contrary to what Elias anticipated when he envisioned modern civilization. For him, technology was an indispensable component of it, but its other components consisted of individual freedom and cultural enrichment. To redirect such a long lasting process requires a new potent force which is currently absent.
Epilogue

I have chosen to review D. J. Salinger’s 1951 novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, as an epilogue to the present thesis. The choice has to do with the author’s artistic mastery to incite a change of focus in modern Western civilization. In some ways, the novel is the logical conclusion of what Norbert Elias had in mind when he spoke of the civilizing process. For while *The Catcher* portrays a world different from the one that Elias had conceptualized, it at the same time tallies with his transcendental view of civilization. The novel pertains to American society in the post-Second World War period when social control through cultural and ideological hegemony laid the ground for an uncritically receptive mass culture. *The Catcher* defies such a culture and seeks an authentic one that is potentially subversive of the power elite. Childhood is his measure of authenticity against which he defines all that is unnatural and ‘phony’. It is also his source of inspiration through which he tries to reshape the world after the child’s image.

Although the novel was not “a hard-core communist-type book”, as a lawyer argued while representing an incensed father, it was nevertheless seen as encouraging “a lessening of spiritual values, which in turn leads to communism.”¹ Beyond the political anxiety of the conservative order, this expressed the novel’s radical tendency to cast aside class and age differences. Hence, *The Catcher in the Rye*, prefigures “a feature of youth quake”², which is bent on subverting parental and other forms of authority. *The Catcher* ‘ridiculed the ‘manifest’ father, and authority in general, while depicting ‘latent’ father-figures as sinister, aggressive, and utterly unprincipled in their persecution of their hero or heroine.’³ The character’s unconventionality, lack of self-discipline and blasphemous tone lampooned the orderly, hierarchical and pretentious adult world as it set in motion “the ethos of disaffiliation that [was] fiercely obnoxious to the adult society.”⁴

The *Catcher* also mimicked the bourgeois life, as embodied in “snobbery, privilege, class injury, culture as badge of superiority, sexual exploitation, education

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subordinated to status, warped social feeling, competitiveness, stunted human possibility”, thus mirroring contradictions specific to American social life in the mid-twentieth century.5

These features of the novel clearly distinguish it from the preceding novel, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and as such account for much of its continued relevance and popularity.

Sixteen-year old Holden Caulfield is the protagonist and the epitome of this historic revolt. His eccentric and nonconformist views make him appear to be a social misfit, but it is precisely these characteristics that led many generations of disaffected youth to closely identify with Holden, viewing him as a champion of their cause against the oppressive and conventional world of adults. John Hinckley, arrested for an attempt on the life of Ronald Reagan in 1981, expressed this identification: “if you want my defence all you have to do is read Catcher in the Rye. It seemed to be time to read it again.” The same language was used by a certain Paul to justify, rather implausibly, David Chapman’s murder of John Lennon a year before. Paul not only claimed that “the reading of that book would be his [Chapman’s] defence”, but also presented it “as a ‘manifesto of hate’ against phonies.”6 Richard Schickel wondered, justifiably enough, whether these expressions of disaffection faithfully reflected Holden’s views.7 But the journalist, Stephen Kafner, an old admirer of Holden, confirmed in 1971, two decades after reading the novel: “The new audience is never different from the Old Holden. They may not know the words, but they can hum along the malady. My distress is theirs. They, too, long for the role of adolescent savoir.”8

The story begins with Holden’s expulsion from Pencey Prep, the third school to expel him for failing. Returning to his hometown, New York City, he leads a twilight existence in hotels, nightclubs, parks, and museums to avoid facing his family. The experience intensifies his loneliness and alienation, which fuelled his growing hatred for the “phonies” such as crooked officials, actors, lawyers, pretentious intellectuals, handsome guys, and friends, including his older brother D. B, who has “prostituted” his talent to Hollywood. His ten-year old sister, Phoebe, is the only one whom he relates to. It is eventually the emotional tie with Phoebe that draws him home.

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Since its publication, Salinger’s novel has attracted both critical and sympathetic reviews. The critics denounced it for the “immorality and perversion” that such writers of talent recount “in the name of art and good intention.” Sympathetic reviewers like Clifton Fadiman, on the other hand, applauded the author’s artistic genius, “that rare miracle of fiction”, wherein “a human being has been created out of ink, paper, and the imagination.” In both cases, it is Salinger himself much more than Holden, the protagonist, who has been the focal point of reference. Of all the reviews on the novel, few have actually focused on Salinger’s fictional personage, his narrative voice, and his historical significance. The rest have categorized him simply as a psychological case in need of help and treatment.

The result has been a failure on the part of many to comprehend the social and historical dimensions in Holden’s critique of the contemporary world. Thus, Ernest Jones, an authoritative psychologist at the time, missed the point when he remarked: “The Catcher in the Rye becomes more and more a case history of all of us.” What he meant was a psychological crisis, not exclusive to Holden, but a universal phenomenon, operative at a particular phase of human life. For this reason, he considered it irrelevant if “the alienation, the hatreds, and the disgust [shown by Holden] are those of a sixteen-year-old.” These increasingly factitious “emotional ups and downs”, he concluded, depended on “the reader’s recollection of merely similar difficulties,” since “the unique crisis and the unique anguish are not re-created.”

As the psychological interpretation of The Catcher became fashionable during the first decade of its publication, Salinger’s fictional character was depicted as inherently “abnormal.” Thus S. N. Behrman ascribed to Holden the qualities of “hypersensitivity” and “hyper-imagination”, which make him singularly susceptible to external pressures. In another psychological assessment by William Wiegand, such pressures are, however, completely ruled out. “Salinger’s hero”, he argued, “has no capacity to purge his sensations”, and is “blown up like a balloon, or like a bananafish, with his memories.” He is “carried along in the currents of his own psyche”, and submerged by “the sheer weight of the

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accumulated burden.” Wiegand therefore arrived at the conclusion that Holden “is a victim not so much of society as of his own spiritual illness.” A decade later, the critics added an ideological factor. They claimed that his eccentricity, which blocked his entry into the future world of adults, reflected a conservative tendency to perpetuate “the innocence of childhood.”

Thus, Warren French branded Holden as a conservative “because he does not have the nerve to be anything else.” He saw the character’s sole ambition of becoming a catcher in the rye, of rescuing children from falling off “some crazy cliff”, as an unrealistic attempt at “keeping children from growing up.” He reconciled himself to external realities, “resigned himself to the phoniness of the world”, and is “unwilling to make any distinction within the ‘phony’ world.” Similarly, Peter Shaw judged, “If Holden is a casualty of society, he is also a psychological case in his own right.” He rejected altogether any “reformist impulse” in Holden, since his “justly famous instinct for exposing phoniness appears personal and self-involved rather than socially oriented.” Here, Shaw was pointing to the inseparability of the character’s mental state from his negative judgement of the world. French, jointly with Marc Rosenberg, reiterated that “Holden suffers because of an undisciplined hypersensitivity”, and he dismissed “those who make a martyr of Holden are victims of the same immature hypersensitivity that he is.”

R. J. Huber’s Adlerian interpretation of The Catcher was a subtler socio-psychological perception of Holden as mentally unstable. Here, Holden’s worldview is partly recognized in light of the structural flaws of contemporary society, while the cynicism that characterizes him as the “prototype of a maladjusted person” is rejected. Beneath this negative “schema of apperception”, argues Huber, lies “an intense feeling of failure and

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inferiority”, which is reflected in Holden’s recurring experience of loss and fall during his psychic episode. Subsequently, Huber sees in Holden a “self-seeking grandiosity”, which he uses to compensate for his sense of insecurity by excluding others from his social sphere. The mechanism at work is an “unrealistic imagination”, which gives the neurotic only “an illusory view of enhancement of his self-esteem.” On this account, Holden’s critical view of the world becomes an indication of his insanity, which being devoid of any real concern ultimately serves “a useless goal.”

The depiction of Holden as pursuing a futile mission also appears in the more sympathetic reviews. Joyce Rowe, though an admirer of Holden, still saw him as one who committed himself to “a hopeless vision that makes all the more acute his disgust with the actual,” and as performing “a kind of self-mutilation against that part of himself which is hostage to the society that has shaped him.” She concludes: “By the end of the story Holden does realize that his vision of himself as catcher was only a daydream. He cannot save himself or those he loves.” The same is stated by Bernard Kinnick who sees in him “[t]he idealistic rebellion of adolescent” which “is a good thing when it is harnessed to idealistic and utopian scheme”, but “in the hard world of practicality.”

This impracticality of Holden’s mission is further pointed out by William Glasser, who interprets it as a sign of immaturity and the result of being “stalled within an early state of childhood.” It is only by “re-experiencing his own childhood in relationship with that of Phoebe’s generation”, argues Glasser, that Holden gains an awareness of “the futility of attempting any retreat from this world”, as he is capable of associating childhood, “not only with the past, as something waning and ending, but also with the future, as something beginning and becoming.” Glasser echoes Bungert who maintains that “the high point of the novel” is Holden’s accomplishment of “a community of feelings” with Phoebe, thus urging him to abandon his “wish for the preservation of the unsullied purity and beauty” of

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childhood, which proves “as unfulfillable and just as illusory as a return to his own lost childhood.”

Given the absence of an historical frame of reference in such critiques, the cure prescribed for Holden is none other than conformity. His resignation to the psychiatrist’s couch is anxiously hailed as a sign of return to sanity. The novel’s moment of sorrow becomes a happy ending for those attuned to conventional wisdom. Yet, as Heiserman and Miller point out, “it is not Holden who should be examined for a sickness of the mind, but the world in which he sojourned and found himself an alien.” To “cure” him independently of his outside world, they observed caustically, is to force him into “the contagious, almost universal disease of phony adulthood”, and ultimately pushing him over “that crazy cliff.”

Hence, the problem is not how to cure Holden, but how to understand the historical significance of this fictional character in the context of an advanced industrial society. Holden Caulfield fits neither the world of children, nor that of adults, yet his vivid memory of the past and his strong sense of the future connect him to both. Such a vantage point from which he relates to the world is symbolized in his personal conduct: “Sometimes I act quite young for my age”, while at other times, “I act a lot older than I am – I really do.” This is manifested in his physical appearance, especially in his salt-and-pepper hair.

To Holden, adulthood is a world in which the relationship between the individual and nature is lost. It is synonymous with “phoniness”, “the fictitious modes of behaviour”, and in a word “the suffering of being unable to love”. Childhood is by contrast a special phase in human life marked by spontaneity and a strong sense of attachment to nature. He therefore refrains from entering the phony world of adults, by holding onto the unadulterated world of children marked by spontaneity and authenticity. Holden hates actors for being “phony” adults, since they “never act like people”, nor do “they act like actors.” He goes on to say: “Even good actors seldom act as they ought to, and they appear boastful and artificial. I mean they [are] good, but they [are] too good. And if any actor’s really good, you can always tell he knows he’s good, and that spoils it.” Herein lies Holden’s dissection of the

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25. French, *J. D. Salinger*, 128.
alienated and disguised self that underlies his characterization of the phonies in the world of acting as well as in real life.

Thus, lawyers in his opinion are as bad actors as movie stars, in that their motive is not really to save innocent people, but to “make a lot of dough”, or to seek recognition “the way it is in dirty movies.” He also holds the same opinion of ministers who “can’t talk in their natural voices”, and they “all have these Holy Joe voices”, which make them sound so phony. Such people, like actors, fit his description of phoniness, and so do many others, as for example those visiting Allie’s tomb on Sundays. The visitors would come to the cemetery and place flowers on his tombstone, but when it rained they all would start “running like hell over to their cars.” They could then “turn on their radios and …go someplace nice for dinner- everybody except Allie.”

Other examples are his aunt and Sally Hayes’ “crazy mother”, whose extravagant life style and social status would always interfere with their charity work. “My aunt’s pretty charitable”, states Holden, but “when she does anything charitable she’s always very well-dressed and has lipstick on and all that crap.” As for the latter, “Jesus Christ. The only way she could go around with a basket collecting dough would be if everybody kissed her ass for her when they made a contribution.” If not appreciated, “she’d hand in her basket and then go somewhere swanky for lunch.” Insincerity is also an epithet with which he characterizes his brother D.B., a talented writer, who “went to Hollywood and prostituted himself.” It is for this reason that Holden turns down the offer to appear in a movie: “I figured that anybody that hates the movies as much as I do, I’d be a phony if I let them stick me in a movie short.”

Holden’s quest for authentic self and authentic culture is precisely what leads him to identify with childhood. This is seen in his admiration of the spontaneity and meaningfulness of children’s ideas and actions. “Kids’ notebooks kill me, Phoebe’s or anybody’s”, he exclaims when going through his younger sister’s notebook. The same admiration is also expressed when he comments on children’s natural look: “You take adults, they look lousy when they’re asleep and they have their mouths way open, but kids don’t. Kids look all right. They can even have spit all over the pillow and they still look all right.”

The spontaneity and naturalness to which Holden closely relates also finds expression in his aversion to sexual intercourse with a prostitute for whom he has no feelings. As he states in a conversation with one of his ex-teachers: “I can never get really sexy- I mean really sexy-with a girl I don’t like a lot. I mean I have to like her a lot. If I don’t, I sort of lose my goddam desire for her and all.” Similarly, his fascination with a kettle drummer at the Radio City Music Hall is all about the spontaneity of an emotion, which is artistically expressed. The man hardly gets a chance to play, “but never looks bored when he isn’t.” Then when he does it, he “does it so nice and sweet, with this nervous expression on his face. He is the best drummer I ever saw.” He contrasts the experience to the “phoniness” of the celebrated performers, like Ernie, a snobbish pianist at the nightclub, who no longer knows “when he’s playing right or wrong.”

Holden’s enchantment with the spontaneity and naturalness of children accounts for his fascination with a perpetual state of changelessness. Ideally, the best situation for him is when “nobody’d move”, as for example in the New York Museum of Natural History where “everything always stayed right where it was.” Or, in carousels, where he could always hear the same songs being played ever since he was a little kid. Conversely, any change towards disrupting his static worldview would arouse anxiety. The seasonal dislocation of the ducks in the Central Park made him anxious. “I was wondering where the ducks went when the lagoon got icy and frozen over.”

Phoebe was right then when she addressed Holden disapprovingly: “You don’t like anything that’s happening…. You don’t like any schools. You don’t like a million things. You don’t.”29 Yet, Holden’s desire to see the world static did not necessarily mean an aversion to all things he experienced. He certainly liked the two nuns who, unlike his aunt and Salley Hayes’s “crazy mother”, “went around collecting dough in those beat-up old straw baskets”, and “never went anywhere swanky for lunch.” He only disliked “certain things” that would sully the natural world of childhood and force him to enter the senseless world of adults. His unease over the seasonal dislocation of the ducks reflected his fear of disturbing a natural rhythm akin to undermining children’s spontaneity and naturalness. He

worried lest “some guy came in a truck and took them away to a zoo or something.”

Here, the act of human intervention in the animal world and the displacement of some living species to an artificial setup like a zoo, corresponds to the forced entry of children into the phony world of adults.

William Glasser rightly describes Holden’s resistance to change as a way of safeguarding the pristine state of childhood: “Any kind of fall, from a cliff, into a street, out of window – implies a loss of childhood spirit, which Holden would prefer to keep up, on a cliff, above any involvement with the world below.” Accordingly, the symbolic childhood thrift in Holden is quite apposite to his name. Holden is the “archaic past participle of ‘hold’, and ‘Caul’, “a membrane sometimes enveloping the head of a child at birth”, or “a kind of cap” in Old French. The use of these words is consistent with Holden’s tendency to hold on to his childhood, “which is ‘held’ for him by a ‘caul’, a kind of cap. That is what the red hunting hat stands for. Glasser concludes: “just as a membrane enveloping the head of a child at birth would temporarily keep the child from perceiving the world into which it is born, Holden’s red hunting hat functions at times to close him off from his world.”

He quotes Holden: “I pulled the peak of my hunting hat around to the front, then pulled it way down over my eyes. That way I couldn’t see a goddam thing….” In this way, Warren French is not all that specious when he states: “it is most obviously the border between the carefree innocence of childhood and the phony adult world that Holden himself does not wish to enter.”

There is, however, a purpose in Holden’s steady and perpetual representation of childhood. Innocence is opposed to the artificiality of life imposed by the conditions of contemporary alienation. To retain innocence or to remain natural is, in Holden’s view, to avoid falling into a vacuous state of being, devoid of emotional spontaneity and spiritual bliss. This imagined notion of the child as innocent and spontaneous provides him with a basis for the possibility of human salvation in a morally degrading and socially dehumanizing world. Echoing Holden, Heiserman and Miller note: “If we could return to

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32. French, *J. D. Salinger*, 120.
childhood, or to noble savagery; or if we could retain the spontaneity of childhood, our social
and personal problems would disappear.”

Holden’s historical significance lies in his reconstruction of childhood as the
archetype of a pre-socialized mind, which would dissolve the social mores and conventions
of the adult society. It overcomes contemporary alienation through a new mode of
socialization in which the emotional child fuses with the intellectual adult. Holden’s image
of the innocent child consequently serves “an ‘over-determined’ response to the limitations
of social and individual reality”, which always confront him, making it all possible for the
self and the world “to exist in an enchanted unity.”

The child hero with whom Holden identifies is an imaging mad child, who knows
of no social norms and conventions in the modern sense of the word. He is the embodiment
of the child’s executive power, as he acts with emotional intensity, without accepting rules
of self-restraint. Holden’s smoking in the dorm, designed to incense his law-abiding
roommate, exemplifies his noncompliant attitude towards the regimented world around him.
“…. I lay on my bed and lit a cigarette…. I did it to annoy Stradlater. It drove him crazy
when you broke any rules. He never smoked in the dorm. It was only me.” He takes the same
liberties with the rules of English composition when he writes Stradlater an assignment about
the poems on Allie’s baseball mitt, thus causing his incensed roommate to expostulate: “You
don’t do one damn thing the way you’re supposed to.” He defied the dictum of his teacher,
Mr. Spencer: “life is a game that one plays according to the rules.”

Similarly, the spontaneity with which he fantasizes about Sally and expresses his
desire to marry her speaks to an unfettered natural emotion. Strangely enough, on dating
Sally, “I felt like marrying her the minute I saw her…. I didn’t even like her much, and yet
all of a sudden I felt like I was in love with her and wanted to marry her.” In one sense, the
child hero in Holden is the reincarnation of the pre-modern image of the child and the
madman, as his spontaneity and eccentricity stand in sharp contrast to the artificiality and
conformity of the modern adult.

33 Heiserman and Miller, “J. D. Salinger…”, 132-33.
34 Rowe, “Holden Caulfield and American Protest”, 80, 82.
35 Salinger, Catcher in the Rye, 12.
These two qualities of the child hero appear time and again in Holden’s description of himself when acting in the spirit of spontaneity: “I’m crazy. I swear to God I am.” It is also apparent from the manner in which he associates madness with childish traits such as seen in Pheobe, whom he refers to as “a true madman.” It is no wonder that of all the prominent figures cited in the Bible the one he values most, next to Jesus, is that lunatic man who “lived in the tombs and kept cutting himself with stones.” He ranks him ten times higher than the disciples, the latter being “as much use to [Jesus] as a hole in the head.” Here, the madman’s artlessness, like childhood innocence, is another expression of human authenticity that fits into Holden’s philosophical scheme.

Madness and Spontaneity as a Threat Against the Power Elite

Madness and spontaneity threaten to undermine the cultural and ideological basis of the power elite; and Holden’s use of the term “phoniness” to describes their falsity contains a subversive connotation. As Carol and Richard Ohmann note: “The clues to phoniness”, lie not just “in outward forms of conduct” but “in the economic and social arrangements of capitalism, and in their concealment.” Thus, Mr. Hass, Holden’s former head-master at Elkton Hills, “is not just personally mean”, but “his phoniness and his power to hurt depend on established class system that institutionalizes slight and injury.” His “phony smile follows an external convention, but accords poorly with emotional reality.” Similarly, “his handshakes imply equality, but thinly hide the reverse of equality.” This analytic view of Mr. Hass in class terms concurs with Holden’s descriptive account of his character:

… [He] went around shaking hands with everybody’s parents when they drove up to school. He’d be charming as hell and all. Except if some boy had little old funny-looking parents. You should’ve seen the way he did with my roommate’s parents. I mean if a boy’s mother was sort of fat or corny-looking or something, and if somebody’s father was one of those guys that wear those suits with very big shoulders and corny black-and-white shoes, then old Hass would just shake hands with them.

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and give them a phony smile and then he’d go talk, for may be half an hour, with somebody else’s parents. I can’t stand that stuff.\(^{38}\)

Holden’s characterization of Mr. Hass as “the phoniest bastard” is serious blow to the power elite who most conspicuously fit his description: “some people are bastards, others are jerks.” The most severe attack is unleashed, as he proceeds with his account of Ossenberger, an old Pencey graduate who rose to prominence through a business enterprise of some dubious nature.

He made a pot of dough in the undertaking business after he got out of Pencey. What he did, he started these undertaking parlors all over the country that you could get members of your family buried for about five bucks apiece. You should see old Ossenberger. He probably just shoves them in a sack and dumps them in a river.\(^{39}\)

Ossenberger is further reported to have enhanced his prominent status by giving “a pile of dough” to Pencey in return for having his name after Holden’s dormitory. This ostentatious and self-serving act of charity warrants his ceremonial reception by the entire school when he arrives in “this big goddam Cadillac” to inaugurate the first annual football game, followed by his commending speech in the chapel.

He started with about fifty corny jokes, just to show us what a regular guy he was. Very big deal. Then he started telling us how he was never ashamed, when he was in some kind of trouble or something, to get right down on his knees and pray to God. He told us we should always pray to God- talk to Him and all- wherever we were. He told us we ought to think of Jesus as our buddy and all. He said he talked to Jesus all the time. Even when he was driving his car. That killed me. I can just see the big phony bastard shifting into first gear and asking Jesus to send him a few more stiffs.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{38}\) Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, 14-15

\(^{39}\) Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, 22.

\(^{40}\) Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*, 23.
Subversion of Social Forms and Conventions

*The Catcher* further challenges the whole discourse of conformity, conventionality, and submission to authority, which allows for a subservient mentality. To this end, he induces a counter-discourse that pointedly targets civility, the very concept on which the elite’s cultural and ideological claim to superiority rests. The recourse to uninhibited animal traits is a symbolic representation of this counter-discourse which Holden recounts while attending Ossenberger’s talk at Pencey Prep:

The only good part of his [Ossenberger] was right in the middle of it. He was telling us all about what a swell guy he was, what a hot-shot and all, then all of a sudden this guy sitting in the row in front of me, Edgar Marsalla, laid this terrific fart. It was a very crude thing to do, in chapel and all, but it was also quite amusing. Old Marsalla.41

Here, the challenge to the power elite becomes apparent. As Carol and Richard Ohmann again observe, “a fart is the antithesis of ceremony”, which by asserting the body “assaults manners and convention.” It, too, “shatters Ossenberger’s hypocrisy and boastfulness”, as it “strikes at the social idea of ‘speech’ itself.” Similarly, this act of bodily assertion “mocks the meaning of ‘sitting in the row’ that challenges not only “Ossenberger’s false ideology, but also the very existence of social forms.”42

The latter challenge conforms to Holden’s critique of the codes and etiquette of the modern school system as instruments of social control. His disapproval of the official line of Pencey Prep speaks to the point: “since 1888 we have been moulding boys into splendid and clear-thinking young men.” This lays claim to “character formation”, to which Holden responds: “Strictly for birds.”43 The same view is expressed in his descriptive account of the oppressive nature of school discipline. This is stated in conjunction with a little school kid who “had one of those wooden passes sticking out of his hip pocket, the same way we used to have, to show he had permission and all to go to the bathroom.”44

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42. Carol and Richard Ohmann, “Reviewers…”, 29.
The counter-discourse against the conventional wisdom of the dominant elite is complemented by Holden’s rejection of the monopolistic and hierarchically institutionalized forms of knowledge. It had important ramifications for the school system, as “students could now tell their teachers what to read.”

Such is in fact the message that Holden Caulfield tacitly conveys to his history teacher in a single-paragraph exam paper.

The Egyptians are extremely interesting to us today for various reasons. Modern science would still like to know what the secret ingredients were that the Egyptians used when they wrapped up dead people so that their faces would not rot for innumerable centuries. This interesting riddle is still quite a challenge to modern science in the twentieth century.

What concerns the old-fashioned teacher is the brevity of the paper, which attempts to exclude irrelevant information. A glance at the content of the essay demonstrates the point. It invokes cultural traditions to reveal the inadequacy of modern science, and proposes a form of knowledge defined as a universally shared popular wisdom. The two notions constitute a radical challenge to the elitist, egoistic, and domineering nature of the established form of knowledge.

The challenge lies in Holden’s critical view of the unimaginative and socially indifferent character of modern education, which is increasingly associated with materialistic goals. It is exemplified in his comment on the boys’ schools: “All you do is study so that you can … buy a goddam Cadillac.” This could appeal only to “phonies” who use education to gratify their consumerist impulse. The objective rather, as he further points out in his essay, is to enter the realm of the unknown. Whereas for the history teacher, Mr. Spencer, the essay is worthless as a “turd”, which he handles accordingly, for Holden it contains the essence of scientific knowledge. Apart from this succinct educational message, Holden sees no further need to engage in a factual presentation of history. “This is all I know about the Egyptians. I can’t seem to get very interested in them…”, he says in his enclosed note to Mr. Spencer.

45. Hamilton, In Search of J. D. Salinger, 156.
46. Salinger, Catcher in the Rye, 16.
Subsequently, Holden directs his criticism at age segregation in the hierarchically structured modern educational institutions. The seclusion of children and youth from the surrounding world, caused by an age-graded system, and symbolized in school uniform, is a target of this criticism. However, he deplored the discrimination in confining advanced learning to a particular level of biological maturity, which deprived younger age groups of certain rights and privileges. “I am a goddam minor”, Holden explodes in exasperation when prevented from adult activities like drinking in a bar.\textsuperscript{47} He rebels against the unequal social treatment of non-adults, which makes them “outsiders to the dominant social institutions”, and “subordinate and powerless in relation to adults.”\textsuperscript{48}

Holden’s critique of the divisive and discriminatory nature of modern education is absorbed into his egalitarian ideology. It reacts against the growing class differentiation which, as already noted by Ariès, marks off the present from the past. Holden feels guilty about his affluent middle-class advantages. “I hate it if I’m eating bacon and eggs or something and somebody else is only eating toast and coffee”, he agonizes as he notes the contrast between his own lifestyle and that of the two poverty-stricken nuns. It is well expressed in Holden’s narration of his experience with Dick Slagle, his roommate at Elkton Hills. Their class backgrounds are represented by the brands of their suitcases: Holden’s is expensive, Slagle’s is not. An embarrassed Holden decides to hide his own suitcases under his bed “so that old Slagle wouldn’t get a goddam inferiority complex about it.” However, the subterfuge does not eliminate their deep-seated class differences. Slagle still resents him for being a “bourgeois”, which leads to their separation. The experience reveals to him how in class-conscious society efforts at removing social cleavages among diverse classes often remain symbolic. As Holden realizes: “You think if they’re intelligent and all…they don’t give a damn whose suitcases are better, but they do. They really do.”\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{47} Salinger, \textit{Catcher in the Rye}, 170, 17, 185.
\textsuperscript{49} Salinger, \textit{Catcher in the Rye}, 143, 141, 142.
In search of an Alternative Concept of Childhood

Salinger’s novel signifies the authentic self as a classless child in an undivided social world of adults and children journeying into the pre-modern era. More than a return to the golden past, it is to be seen as a quest for an alternative model of childhood, which is as much pre-modern as modern in outlook. Such a model provides a new context for socialization, one that uses the past while adhering to the present cultural ethos. This is well reflected in the manner in which the medieval and modern concepts of childhood exchange features. Both features are modified in response to contemporary democratic impulses as well as the author’s own moral values. The adultified character of the medieval child is reconstituted within a new concept of equality that defies age differences, while the modern concept of childhood innocence of is induced to accentuate the child’s special traits. Hence, the child in Salinger’s scheme of socialization is necessarily of a mixed image: one that resembles adults in the sense of sharing their status, and yet is different from them in an emotional and biological sense.

While the novel’s seemingly conservative motif of childhood innocence denotes a significant break with the medieval child, it rejects the modern institution of childhood, which would socialize children into becoming “phony” adults. In both cases, the goal is to accentuate children’s authentic and special nature in contradistinction to ‘phony’ adulthood. Holden’s resolution to remain a silent observer of children’s fall rather than act as their saviour is reflective of a more democratic mode of socialization that recognizes the child’s special traits. As he remarks: “The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it’s bad if you say anything to them.” 50 Unlike the views expressed by critics like French, Glasser, and Rowe, the statement is not an indication of total retreat from Holden’s overall mission as a saviour. Rather, it is suggestive of a move towards the recognition of children’s free will. This is what enables the *Catcher* to establish emotional and intellectual ties with children, sensing that this change in strategy could prevent their tragic fall. To be a catcher may temporarily save children from an imminent fall, but it leaves them no freedom of choice, since acting in this way utterly disregards their independent judgement. On the other hand,

to be a saviour is to reach out to children’s inner thoughts, thus giving expression to their desire for respectful treatment on par with adults. Such considerations ultimately lead Holden to assume his new position as a socializing agent, who would act in accordance with the child’s personal preferences. Like an organic intellectual in the Gramscian sense, the Catcher shares “the mode of being the new intellectuals” which “can no longer consist in eloquence”, but “is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions… in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, ‘permanent persuader’ and not just a simple orator.”

Holden’s critique of intellectuals is perhaps an attempt at reinterpreting the concept in the same mould: “These intellectual guys don’t like to have an intellectual conversation with you unless they’re running the whole thing. They always want you to shut up when they shut up, and go back to your room when they go back to their room.” The target of the criticism is essentially within the scope of the domineering instincts of the adult/intellectual that manifests itself in the realm of communication.

Although the Catcher falls short of accomplishing his mission and is instead forced to succumb to the omnipotent institution of mental illness, he nonetheless leaves a tradition of resistance for future generations of the youth. He induces them to strive for equal rights, embrace a culture and civilization which speak to one’s innermost animal instincts, and formulate a particular adult-child economy that would end the inequality between the ages. All of these posed a threat to the cultural and ideological basis of the power elite at the time when the demand for equality was ever pressing.

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