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The Fabian Child:

English and American Literature and Socialist Reform, 1884-1915

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Amanda Farrell Hollander

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Fabian Child:

English and American Literature and Socialist Reform, 1884-1915

by

Amanda Farrell Hollander

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Joseph E. Bristow, Chair

“The Fabian Child: English and American Literature and Socialist Reform, 1884-1915” intervenes in current scholarship that addresses the impact of Fabian socialism on the arts during the fin de siècle. I argue that three particular Fabian writers—Evelyn Sharp, E. Nesbit, and Jean Webster—had an indelible impact on children’s literature, directing the genre toward less morally didactic and more politically engaged discourse. Previous studies of the Fabian Society have focused on George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and Beatrice Webb and Sidney Webb to the exclusion of women authors producing fiction for child readers. After the Fabian Society’s founding in 1884, English writers Sharp and Nesbit, and American author Webster published prolifically and, in their work, direct their socialism toward a critical and deliberate reform of

literary genres, including the fairy tale, the detective story, the boarding school novel, adventure yarns, and epistolary fiction.

Chapter One examines Evelyn Sharp's radical sexual politics and how her many stories elucidate the connections between women's suffrage and other socialist causes such as housing reform and blood sport. Sharp shows how Victorian ideas of gender performance are often constructed around those who wish to identify or present their gender in a way that diverges from their sex, particularly difficult when generic tropes cast boys and girls in specific, highly delineated roles. Chapter Two tracks the growing socialist impulses of Nesbit's novels, *The Enchanted Castle* and *Harding's Luck*, which depict children forming friendships across class lines and experimenting narratorially with their own roles as protagonists. *Harding's Luck* also, with its disabled hero, shows a growing tension within Fabian socialist thought between the ability of socialism to achieve individualism and a growing fanaticism within the Society for eugenics and collectivism. Chapter Three analyzes how, in the United States, Fabian thought drives the social reform in Jean Webster's final two novels, *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy*, both bestsellers that brought debates about institutional reform, female agency, and genetic destiny to the child reader.

The dissertation of Amanda Farrell Hollander is approved.

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## Introduction

The children mingled with the adults, and spoke and were spoken to. Children in these families, at the end of the nineteenth century, were different from children before or after. They were neither dolls nor miniature adults. They were not hidden away in nurseries, but present at family meals, where their developing characters were taken seriously and rationally discussed, over supper or during long country walks. And yet, at the same time, the children in this world had their own separate, largely independent lives, as children.

—A. S. Byatt, *The Children's Book* (2009)

In these lines from A. S. Byatt's novel, *The Children's Book*, the narrator builds a portrait of an emerging type of child—the Fabian child, understood and engaged with as a sophisticated and intelligent individual.<sup>1</sup> Byatt's novel depicts the Wellwood family, headed by matriarch Olive, who is an author of children's stories and an active member of the socialist Fabian Society. Olive's children are not of the Victorian “seen but not heard” model, nor are they constrained. Instead, they are active spokespeople for themselves, each unique and leading their own distinct lives, leading Olive to produce specialized novels for each child. The character of Olive Wellwood owes a great deal to fin-de-siècle children's writer and Fabian socialist E. Nesbit. Olive struggles to support her large family and remain active as a writer and socialist. A critic and novelist herself, Byatt weaves together fact and fiction in one of the first works in either genre to recognize the importance of Fabian authors' contributions to children's literature.

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<sup>1</sup> A. S. Byatt, *The Children's Book* (New York: Random House, 2009), 39.

Unlike Byatt's *Children's Book*, modern scholarship has largely ignored the remarkable relationship between the work of the Fabian Society and the emergence of a new type of children's literature that diverges from religious or moral didacticism to engage with children's political and social lives. Byatt is one of the few writers to draw on the critical link between the Society's founding and a corresponding shift in children's literature during the fin de siècle. My dissertation takes Byatt's acclaimed work of fiction as a starting-point for examining how three Fabian writers—the English authors Evelyn Sharp (1869-1955) and E. Nesbit (1858-1924), and American novelist Jean Webster (1876-1916)—reform rather than revolutionize existing genres in order to extend socialist thought and agency to children and especially the child reader. Although Byatt's *Children's Book* has reinvigorated interest in the Fabian Society, there are comparatively few critical inquiries into the wealth of literary works that many noted Fabians produced. To be sure, there are several studies that direct their attention to prominent literary luminaries George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and H. G. Wells (1866-1946).<sup>2</sup> It is fair to say that Shaw's and Wells's standing among leading Fabians is similar to that of the married economists Beatrice Webb (1858-1943) and Sidney Webb (1859-1947), whose writings have been subject to extensive debate.<sup>3</sup> But practically all studies of Fabian literary works tend to marginalize or entirely ignore the contributions of E. Nesbit, even though she enjoyed equal fame during her involvement with Fabianism. Although some researchers working individually on Nesbit, Sharp, or Webster consider Fabian socialism in their literary analysis, none has yet looked at these

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<sup>2</sup> For a thorough biography of Shaw, see: Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: The One-Volume Definitive Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005). For work on Wells, refer to: David Smith, *H. G. Wells: Desperately Mortal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> See Royden Harrison, *The Life and Times of Sidney and Beatrice Webb: 1858-1905, the Formative Years* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). Also Norman MacKenzie, *Socialism and Society: A New View of the Webb Partnership* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1978).

children's writers in a single project, which is where my dissertation intervenes. I argue that Nesbit, Sharp, and Webster do not follow a single Fabian rubric for socialism's role in the arts but adopt Fabianism's policy of "reform, not revolution" both aesthetic and moral as they rework existing literary genres in order to create socially conscious and politically engaging stories for children.

In this introduction, I set out to establish the relationship between Fabian socialism and the arts relative to the Fabian Society's origin and political aims. First, I look at the Fellowship of the New Life's goals and founding to show how the Fellowship, like the Fabian Society that developed out of it, maintained a commitment to social justice and its relationship with children's rights and education. Subsequently, I delve into the history of the Fabian Society in order to contextualize my discussions of Sharp, Nesbit, and Webster within British and American iterations of Fabian socialism. Given the Society's ongoing interest in a formal theory of socialism in the arts, I look at existing studies—which have ignored writers of children's literature—and intervene to argue that each of the three woman authors on whom I write took approaches that were as socialist as they were individualistic.

### **From the Fellowship of the New Life to the Fabian Society**

In 1883, Thomas Davidson, a Scottish intellectual, stopped in London to lecture on social progress to a group of young Britons and to discuss his paper "The New Life."<sup>4</sup> As a result of Davidson's visit and ensuing conversation, the group made the decision on 24 October 1883 to

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<sup>4</sup> Edward R. Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1916), 28-30.

form a Fellowship of the New Life, an organization dedicated to “the cultivation of a perfect character in each and all.”<sup>5</sup> Tapping into American Romanticism, most notably the works of Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), the members of the Fellowship wanted to promote a harmonious national society more aligned with a highly idealized version of nature than industrial England had become. Accordingly, the Fellowship founded a periodical, *Seed-Time* (1883-1898) which served as a venue for exploring topics related to the Fellowship’s mission, including education, diet, reading material, and government. Even in the nascent Fellowship, the question of how best to disseminate their ideology reiterated the importance of children. Key to the long-term achievement of their goals, as repeatedly noted in *Seed-Time*, was children’s education. *Seed-Time* contributor Alice Woods evaluated the didactic commentary on education in *Looking Backward* (1887), a time-slip novel by American Fabian Edward Bellamy (1850-1898): “Our methods of education surely lie at the very root of all the social changes that are brought about. If we only knew how to educate our children and youths, so as to draw forth the very best of which they are capable, producing thereby a world of men and women on a far higher level than any we dream of now, many of the social questions, so perplexing to us at present, would solve themselves.”<sup>6</sup> Though Woods advocates improving childhood education, she sharply critiques *Looking Backward*’s advocacy of gender-segregated education and insists instead on the importance of educating boys and girls together. Another member of the Fellowship, E. D. Girdlestone, took to the pages of *Seed-Time* in order to call attention to the need to use education to mold citizenship. He also notes: “the first, and the most important, and the most fundamental aim in education ought to be to lay strong, though tender,

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<sup>5</sup> Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 32.

<sup>6</sup> Alice Woods, “Education in *Looking Backward*,” *Seed-Time* 3 (January 1890): 8.

hold of, and to influence aright, the feelings of the young.”<sup>7</sup> The Fellowship showed a clear and established interest in children and the dissemination of political thought in childhood education. Yet for all these philosophical discussions, from its beginnings certain members of the Fellowship of the New Life wanted to take political action. To develop and build a group focused on socialist politics, these members realized they would need a separate and distinct organization.

On 4 January 1884, a group of members splintered from the Fellowship of the New Life in order to create the Fabian Society. The Society would, its founders agreed, act as a political organization dedicated to the enactment of socialism through gradual reform instead of outright revolution, thus distinguishing themselves from more militant Marxists. The Society’s core members during its heyday included E. Nesbit, Nesbit’s husband Hubert Bland (1855-1914), H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, Edward Pease, Beatrice Webb, Sidney Webb, Graham Wallas (1858-1932), Evelyn Sharp, Edward Carpenter (1844-1929), and Annie Besant (1847-1933). During the 1890s, W. D. P. Bliss (1856-1926) helped to organize an American branch of the Society known as the American Fabians which included Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) writing as Charlotte Perkins Stetson, Edward Bellamy, William Dean Howells (1837-1920), and later adherent Jean Webster. Members included some of the most renowned artists and writers of the period both in Britain and the United States. The Society kept the moral urgency of the Fellowship and merged it with the goal of influencing significant political change within government. Two scholars who put together one of the most comprehensive existing studies of the Fabian Society, Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, discuss the Fabian combination of drive and gradual change: “The notion of waiting was a good deal more appropriate to the handful of

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<sup>7</sup> E. D. Girdlestone, “Education and Socialism,” *Seed-Time* 8 (April 1891): 4.

young Fabians than was the prospect of striking hard. Thomas Davidson had impressed on his acolytes the importance of preparing oneself with patience for a new life. The problem was how to fuse moral regeneration with social change.”<sup>8</sup> The Fabians, particularly Shaw and the Webbs, began to produce a large number of political tracts and arranging drawing room meetings. The Society’s early years were marked by a dogged determination to publicize their unique iteration of socialism. Their “reform, not revolution” approach, though, was not without its detractors. One particularly irate socialist critic, George Strandring, lambasted the Fabians in the periodical the *Radical*, which Strandring both edited and published. He writes:

You might well imagine the scene to be laid in the Duchess of Brickbat’s drawing-room, and fancy the company to consist of Lady Fannys and Lord Arthurs, assembled to exchange the ghastly small talk of fashionable frivolity. But you would be wrong; for these are Willis’s Rooms (or, rather, one of them), and the company is almost exclusively composed of members of the Fabian Society—a Socialist body whose motto is: Don’t be in a hurry; but when you *do* go it, go it thick! (Of course, they don’t express it quite in that way.)<sup>9</sup>

Strandring’s critique, however, was too early. In 1888, four years after the Fabian Society first branched out and the same year that Strandring berated the Society for its reserved approach to socialism, Fabian Annie Besant led the London match-girls’ strike. The strikers, led by Besant, successfully managed to block the Bryant and May match factory from using white phosphorus,

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<sup>8</sup> Norman MacKenzie and Jeanne MacKenzie, *The Fabians* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 42.

<sup>9</sup> George Strandring, “Butchered to Make a Fabian Holiday,” *Radical* (April 1888): 1.

which had devastating health effects on the factory's workers.<sup>10</sup> Not only did the strike demonstrate that the Fabians, largely born into the middle class, were able to organize and lead a strike of working class people, but it also linked the Society formally with the rights of child workers and children in general. Sharp and Nesbit themselves actively involved themselves in not just the writing for, but also advocacy on behalf of children. Yet, for all their involvement with Fabian politics, Sharp and Nesbit have remained largely invisible in histories of the Fabian Society.

The Fabian interest in the arts, however, has been the subject of a major study. Australian scholar Ian Britain, who has written one of the few books on the Fabian Society, focuses on the organization's cultural reach, particularly Fabians' consistent interest in the arts as a medium for the dissemination of socialism.<sup>11</sup> Yet, as he proceeds to explain, the diverse opinions and attitudes of the Society's members made forming a single policy or theory for the relationship between art and socialism: "It must be admitted straightaway that none of the Fabians—though more indebted to [William] Morris than is generally recognized for the nurturing of their youthful Fabian instincts—ever came close to working out a comparable blueprint for popular culture in a socialist society."<sup>12</sup> The Fabians remained a remarkably diverse group in their approaches and opinions on how best to incorporate their political goals into their writing. Britain's research, while important, gives only the most glancing of mentions to Nesbit, in spite of her huge influence as one of the Society's founding members, as a frequent lecturer in the early years of the Society, and as one of Fabianism's most influential writers both in her lifetime

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<sup>10</sup> MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *The Fabians*, 91.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Britain, *Fabianism and Culture: A Study in British Socialism and the Arts c. 1884-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 18.

<sup>12</sup> Britain, *Fabianism and Culture*, 232.



and beyond. Sharp, an active Fabian and one of the movement's most powerful suffragists, does not even appear in Britain's history of the Society. In the MacKenzie's account, too, Nesbit appears only as a specter of the movement rather than as one of its central figures. Scholarship that does discuss either Nesbit or Sharp in relation to each one's Fabian activism focuses on one woman or the other without addressing the broader links between Fabian writers. As such, a divide remains between, on the one hand, historical studies of Fabianism and, on the other hand, focused literary scholarship on Fabian women writing for children and the complicated, sometimes contradictory ways in which they seek to reform popular genres within children's literature.

As Britain mentions, one of the most notable aspects of the Fabian Society—in spite of the fact that it counted many ambitious and talented artists among its members—was that it had no cohesive vision or policy for socialist didacticism in the arts. To be fair, nor were all the Fabians united in their politics. Sharp directed the majority of her political activism toward the achievement of full suffrage for women, an issue that caused fissures within the Society. By comparison, Nesbit took umbrage with the movement for moving attention away from socialism and toward votes for women. Another Fabian put his own thoughts more bluntly: “Frankly, I distrust the influence of women in politics, municipal or national.”<sup>13</sup> Within a few years of the Society's genesis, however, Fabians were beginning to recognize and argue that art could comment on and even drive the impetus for social change, the dominant commentary coming from male Fabians. Wells, during his brief tenure in the Society, argued fervently for the efficacy of socialism in art, using Oscar Wilde as his example: “[I]n Oscar Wilde's *The Soul of Man*

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<sup>13</sup> G. F. B. Sharp, *Nursling* 11 (December 1911): 10. It is worth noting that G. F. B. Sharp bore no relation to Evelyn and all references to “Sharp” without a given name in this dissertation refer to Evelyn.

*under Socialism* there is an admirable contribution to the aesthetic aspect of propaganda.”<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps one of the most ardent promoters of socialism as a way to awaken morality in the bourgeoisie was Graham Wallas, who wrote frequently for *Seed-Time* and various Fabian publications. Wallas, whose most famous contribution to socialism was his critique of modern industrial economies in *Property under Socialism* (1889), viewed the arts as an ideal conduit for Fabian socialism:

Since Dickens wrote, many of the great novelists of Europe have found that there is more scope for their art in the real sufferings of the masses who work than in the fancies and misunderstandings of idle ladies and gentlemen. He who takes up one of Zola’s stories, even from the sorriest motive, puts it down with a picture of injustice, and brutality, and disease burnt into his brain. Painting, the theatre, book illustration, and photography, all help in so quickening our imagination and memory that we are beginning to feel that the easiest way to get rid of the intolerable consciousness of our neighbours’ sufferings is to try to cure them.<sup>15</sup>

London provided limitless opportunities to witness poverty and disease, but Wallas recognizes that fiction provides a highly effective tool toward educating the public while awakening their empathy. He links this artistic activism with a specifically English tradition, as evidenced by the primacy of Charles Dickens in Wallas’ example. Nor was Wallas isolated in his insistence that the arts and political change had common ground. Journalist and publisher Holbrook Jackson (1874-1948), who was a member of the Society until 1904, suggested in a letter to Fabian

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<sup>14</sup> H. G. Wells, Proof copy of the *Report of the Special Committee* 1906, box B, folder 2, item 1, Fabian Society Papers, London School of Economics Library, London, UK.

<sup>15</sup> Graham Wallas, “The Motive Power,” *Sunday Chronicle* (11 November 1890): 7.

secretary Edward Pease that perhaps the Society would have more efficacy were they to adopt a policy focused on Art and Philosophy.

At this juncture, the Fabian Society had reached a precarious moment in its existence as Jackson notes, given that Wells was threatening insurrection. Jackson decided that more focus could help united Fabians in their goal. He writes: “The F. S. in the past has created a definite Socialist attitude in both Politics & Sociology. Why not do the same for ART and PHILOSOPHY? These seem to me two necessary and legitimate fields for Fabian work.”<sup>16</sup> Authors like Shaw, Nesbit, Sharp, and Gilman already had written and published many stories with a Fabian socialist drive by the time Jackson composed his letter, but, as I argue, they took myriad approaches. No formal Fabian ideology for the arts existed—or would exist—to homogenize the approach. Jackson reiterates this determination to codify a policy toward the arts toward the end of his missive: “I need not elaborate my suggestion in this letter—but briefly my wish is to see the Society forming itself into groups not alone dictated by the accidents of locality but in reference to ideas—and Art, Philosophy, Science and Politics seem to me the main ideas under which social endeavour falls and therefore the most worthy of Fabian exploitation for Socialism.”<sup>17</sup> Jackson would not succeed within the Fabian Society, but as Victorian periodicals scholar Elizabeth Carolyn Miller addresses in her book, *Slow Print*, he would use his connections within the Society to start a journal with A. R. Orage. As Miller observes:

Orage and Jackson hoped to push the Fabian Society, by way of the Arts group, toward a more decentralized vision of social organization and toward a less

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<sup>16</sup> Holbrook Jackson to Edward Pease, 11 December 1906, box B, folder 5, item 51, Fabian Society Papers, London School of Economics Library, London, UK.

<sup>17</sup> Jackson to Pease, 11 December 1906, Fabian Society Papers.

empirical, less scientific approach to socialism. The effort was unsuccessful, and as the Arts Group's lectures and activities became more and more 'abstrusely philosophical,' it would soon collapse, but not before Orage and Jackson received Fabian funds and Fabian endorsements to help launch their next socialist literary effort: the *New Age*.<sup>18</sup>

The *New Age* went on to print socialist articles and went out of its way to review works by Fabian authors and support those writers whose books and stories promoted socialist thought. Overall, the interest in overt socialist didacticism had powerful resonance for all affiliated with Fabian socialism. In his prologue to *Pygmalion* (1912), Shaw famously writes: "It is so intensely and deliberately didactic, and its subject esteemed so dry, that I delight in throwing it at the heads of the wiseacres who repeat the parrot cry that art should never be didactic. It goes to prove my contention that art should never be anything else."<sup>19</sup> Shaw promoted didacticism as fundamentally necessary. Moreover, Shaw's attitude is consistent with the writing of John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* (1859) in which the latter argued repeatedly that children were completely malleable.<sup>20</sup> His work had an influence on many socialist movements, including Fabianism. Sharp, Nesbit, and Webster, by contrast, create narratives that engage child readers not as empty vessels in need of instruction and moral lessons able to be molded into any political philosophy. Rather, these writers engage with children as complex political thinkers.

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 249.

<sup>19</sup> George Bernard Shaw, "Preface to *Pygmalion*," in *George Bernard Shaw's Plays*, ed. Sandie Byrne (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 288-99.

<sup>20</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1859), 190.

## The Fabian Reformation of Genre in Children's Fiction

In my first chapter, I examine how Sharp reworks the fairy tale genre to expand existing definitions of gender to make space for transgender and non gender-normative children. Sharp's socialism was largely impacted by work for suffragism and her reforms dissect and rearrange models of female passivity and masculine dominance. Sharp writes: "Childhood, at its worst, is unhappy; at best, it is uncomfortable."<sup>21</sup> Addressing a broad range of her fairy tales and one realist novel for children, I argue that Sharp reforms the genres to deconstruct Victorian gender binaries and expose them to critique. Sharp enjoyed a close friendship with homosexual campaigner Edward Carpenter, who wrote openly about gender and sexuality, and she also frequently contributed to Henry Harland's quarterly periodical, the *Yellow Book*, which included the work of many Fabians before folding in 1897 in the wake of the Wilde trials when Wilde was erroneously connected with the periodical. Sharp published several stories in the *Yellow Book*, including "The End of an Episode" (1895), "A New Poster" (1895), and "In Dull Brown" (1896).<sup>22</sup> My analysis, however, focuses on her work specifically written and published for children. In "The Boy Who Looked Like a Girl" (1897), Sharp exploits children's dress to show how the body's gender may be built and subsequently revoked.<sup>23</sup> Boy, the protagonist, confronts the gender binaries in which he will never fit and asserts his right to declare his gender in a way

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<sup>21</sup> Evelyn Sharp, *Fairy Tales: As They Are, as They Were, and as They Should Be* (Brighton: D. B. Friend) 1889, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Evelyn Sharp, "The End of an Episode," *Yellow Book* 4 (January 1895): 255-74; Evelyn Sharp, "A New Poster," *Yellow Book* 6 (July 1895): 123-66; Evelyn Sharp, "In Dull Brown," *Yellow Book* 8 (January 1896): 180-204.

<sup>23</sup> Evelyn Sharp, "The Boy Who Looked like a Girl," in *Wymps and Other Fairy Tales* (London: The Bodley Head, 1897), 69-90.

that does not conform to his outward presentation. I proceed to put this short story in conversation with Sharp's Edwardian novel *The Other Boy* (1902), which features a child, Charlotte, also known as Charley, who continually insists that the other children recognize Charley as a boy, not a girl.<sup>24</sup> The novel also features an effeminate boy Tony and a New Woman bicycle-riding governess, all of whom challenge the masculine Ted's conceptions of gender. To help provide the framework for my discussion, I structure my discussion through several recent interventions in transgender studies, most significantly Susan Stryker's *Transgender History* (2008) and Gayle Salamon's *Assuming a Body* (2010). I also contend that though Sharp's interest largely fixed on what she suggests are deeply unstable and destructive gender and sexual binaries, she also shows repeated engagement with other Fabian concerns including blood sport in "The Hundredth Princess" (1900), disability in "The Little Princess and the Poet" (1898), and sweating (domestic sweatshop labor) and housing in "The Country of Nonamia" (1898).<sup>25</sup> Through these three stories, she shows that the causes of socialism and suffragism are united because these seemingly disparate political issues all relate to questions of gender equality and invites the child to question whether or not there can be a "happily ever after" in the absence of gender parity.

Following my discussion of Sharp's sexually radical writing from children, I move in my second chapter to Nesbit's distinctly Fabian development of the children's novel and the ways in which two of her critically neglected fictional narratives examine how children engage with

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<sup>24</sup> Evelyn Sharp, *The Other Boy* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902).

<sup>25</sup> Evelyn Sharp, "The Hundredth Princess," in *The Other Side of the Sun* (London: The Bodley Head, 1900), 49-70; Evelyn Sharp, "The Little Princess and the Poet," in *All the Way to Fairyland* (London: The Bodley Head, 1898), 71-86; Evelyn Sharp, "The Country of Nonamia," in *All the Way to Fairyland* (London: The Bodley Head, 1898), 3-18.

popular literary genres. First, I argue that Nesbit's brand of Fabianism in her novel *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), suggests that the tropes of genres including the detective story, the boarding school novel, and boys' adventures tales, among others, often exclude children.<sup>26</sup> Nesbit's narratives empower the child characters so that they may negotiate genre or, failing that, expose generic conventions, which often run counter to socialist notions of justice, as a fallacy. Even Nesbit's contemporaries recognized the power of her work for advancing socialist goals. In 1909, *New Age* critic W. R. Titterton observed: "There is, as we have said, something large and heroic about them, something of the old epic as well as of the old fairy. There is no cant, no meanness in them. They have the lofty ethic of knighthood. They brace the nerves, and clear the head of illusions by putting illusion in its proper place. They have more driving power for Socialism than many Fabian pamphlets."<sup>27</sup> Not only does Nesbit examine the shortcomings of Sherlock Holmes stories and romance, she also explores how the classroom itself might be reformed to give all children equal chance for imaginative expression. Nesbit, who remained deeply aware of the limited material resources available to the larger majority of pupils at state schools in Britain, shows how children's transformation of ordinary objects—such as cigarettes, paper domes, broken crockery, disused cotton-reels, and old playing cards—enables them to conceptualize and experience unfamiliar cultures and places in her non-fiction work, *Wings and the Child* (1913).<sup>28</sup> Through the use of books as bricks, old newspapers as robes, handkerchiefs as tents, and old chess pieces as decorative architecture, Nesbit also suggests that through the

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<sup>26</sup> E. Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907).

<sup>27</sup> W. R. Titterton, "E. Nesbit among the Fairies," *New Age* 4, no. 12, (1909): 247.

<sup>28</sup> E. Nesbit, *Wings and the Child* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913).

construction of magical cities, children can build an imaginary landscape in which all sorts of unreal events can intelligibly take place.<sup>29</sup>

Although it would initially appear that Nesbit had a uniformly egalitarian approach to childhood agency in her work, I suggest that her time-slip novel, *Harding's Luck* (1910), shows Nesbit's troubled relationship with disability.<sup>30</sup> Roxana Galusca, writing on the formally established links between nation and the individual body, observes: "Any nation, its imaginary community notwithstanding, relies for its ideological survival not only on linguistic, gender, and racial uniformity but also on entrenched ideals of health and ability."<sup>31</sup> By the time of the writing of *Harding's Luck*, eugenics had started to take powerful hold of the Fabian Society and its members, including luminaries such as Havelock Ellis. The *Fabian News* (1897-1904) began more prominently featuring lectures and book reviews on eugenics and heredity during 1902.<sup>32</sup> With an increased emphasis on genetic destiny and the need to allocate work to the "deserving" (i.e. able-bodied), Nesbit's protagonist, Dickie, finds himself unable to negotiate genre or write himself into a story, as do his predecessors in *The Enchanted Castle*. Dickie imagines himself as

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<sup>29</sup> Historian Ginger Frost in her book on nineteenth-century childhoods provides anecdotal evidence of a poor child's interest in collecting bric-a-brac for play, but Nesbit's suggestion is innovative in that it encourages educators to incorporate these collections in structured pedagogy. See Ginger Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* (Westport: Praeger, 2009), 76.

<sup>30</sup> E. Nesbit, *Harding's Luck* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1910).

<sup>31</sup> Roxana Galusca, "From Fictive Ability to National Identity: Disability, Medical Inspection, and Public Health Regulations on Ellis Island," *Cultural Critique* 72 (2009): 138. Galusca's article focuses on the United States, but her observations about the national concerns with the body of the individual citizen is one that resonates with the concern of Fabian socialists, who were ardent and vocal supporters of eugenics policies on both sides of the Atlantic.

<sup>32</sup> Edward R. Pease, Review of *Alcoholism: A Study in Heredity* By G. Archdall Reid *Fabian News* 12, no. 3 (March 1902): 9. Interestingly, Archdall Reid also gave a lecture in May 1902 to the Fabian Society in which he rejected pure heredity for the idea of acquirements.



the hero of his own narrative, only to have his agency constantly negated by adults responding to his lame leg. This is a feature of several well-known tales featuring disability in the European tradition. In their study, *Narrative Prosthesis*, for example, David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder identify this trait in Andersen's *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* (1838): "In literature this mediating role of the external body with respect to internal subjectivity is often represented as a relation of strict correspondence. Either the 'deviant' body deforms subjectivity, or 'deviant' subjectivity violently erupts upon the surface of its bodily container."<sup>33</sup> In Nesbit's novel, however, Dickie slips into history and in an idealized pastoral England, his leg mends. Ultimately, I suggest, Nesbit's novel troublingly does not allow Dickie to imagine or create a space for himself in the modern world. In the eugenic future, Dickie's body has no future and he chooses, instead, exile in a halcyon past.

My third and final chapter shifts the conversation from British Fabianism to American Fabianism, which embraces a specific strain of American individualism even as the rights of the individual are constantly threatened by capitalist—and even collectivist—interests. Webster wrote several novels prior to the enormous success of *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1912), including two earlier college-themed novels, *When Patty Went to College* (1903) and *Just Patty* (1911), the romantic *Wheat Princess* (1905), and a foray into detective fiction, *The Four Pools Mystery* (1908). I look at the change in Webster's stories in 1912 from these more modest stories to the political interests of her final two books. Even though Webster became an active socialist at Vassar College and remained one throughout her career, she did not engage with politics in either a serious or sustained way in her fiction until *Daddy-Long-Legs*. I focus on her only two

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<sup>33</sup> David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 58.

explicitly socialist works, *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy* (1915). These two novels also are her only epistolary narratives. The first, told from the perspective of a young woman who has left her orphan asylum for a private women's college, opens with a brief third-person omniscient narrator and then shifts entirely to a one-sided correspondence told from the protagonist Judy's first-person perspective through which she explores her radical politics, specifically aligning herself with Fabianism. *Dear Enemy*, unlike *Daddy-Long-Legs*, is told entirely from the first-person perspective of heiress Sallie, and roots her socialist interests in reform, eugenics, and their mutual connection with "unspeakable heredity."<sup>34</sup> Neither of these works has been the subject of sustained inquiries into Fabian fiction. What scant scholarship exists on the influence of Fabianism in American literature tends to concentrate on Gilman's influential oeuvre. Mark W. Van Wienan notes that there was a key connection between British Fabianism and Gilman: "As the election campaign of 1896 was underway, Stetson was in London serving as a delegate at the International Labor and Socialist Congress, where she met and made fast friends with Fabian leaders Beatrice and Sidney Webb."<sup>35</sup> The Webbs' interest in the plight of the poor and the potential of institutional reform and education to drive class equality had a clear influence on the *American Fabian* (1895-1900). Here I show that the Webbs' thinking left a deep impression as well on Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy*.

*Daddy-Long-Legs* follows Judy Abbott, an orphan sent from the asylum where she has spent her life to a women's college, all financed by the anonymous benefactor to whom she writes her letters. I suggest that this novel, like Sharp's and Nesbit's works, shows sustained

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<sup>34</sup> Jean Webster, *Dear Enemy* (New York: The Century Company, 1915).

<sup>35</sup> Mark W. Van Wienan, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Charlotte Perkins Stetson (Gilman) and the Case for American Reform Socialism," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2003): 617.

interest in experimenting with genre in order to obtain narratorial agency. Judy declares herself a suffragist, a Fabian, and eventually a writer. *Daddy-Long-Legs* is a bildungsroman that is as fundamentally tied to the protagonist's development as it is to her adamant and repeated demands for social justice. Unlike Sharp's stories, though, which focus on forging relationships between girls and boys or women and men as partners in gender parity, Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs* suggests that the lack of male voices and narrative interruption are what a woman requires to develop her political and intellectual consciousness. Judy remains aware that she attends college as a result of charity, but she upends the model of benevolence and gratitude by attacking this system as oppressive and constructed to maintain unequal power dynamics between the classes. In my discussion of *Daddy-Long-Legs*, I examine the contradictions of charitable systems in conjunction with Sarah Flew's recent article, "Unveiling the Anonymous Philanthropist: Charity in the Nineteenth Century." Ultimately, Webster's novel depicts Judy achieving independence through what is, by 1912, an outdated epistolary genre. Judy learns to wield epistolary agency with enormous success and concludes with a marriage that crosses class boundaries, giving her the financial power to engage in significant social reform.

Although Webster's intrinsically Fabian *Daddy-Long-Legs* celebrates an orphan's agency, the sequel novel, *Dear Enemy* becomes an ideological battleground between the Fabian socialist promise for greater independence through collectivism and the desire to control and ultimately eliminate those deemed "defective" from society. Already in 1911, one young Fabian signaled the growing role of eugenics within Fabian socialism in the *Nursling*, a Fabian periodical specifically designed for younger, newer members of the Society to debate and disseminate their ideas. He writes: "And just when Democracy is about to make its last and decisive fight for supremacy, the intellectual thought of the day has deserted Democracy and

gone over to Aristocracy. Nietzsche and the Eugenists are without doubt the most potent elements in future thought.”<sup>36</sup> In the years between the publications of *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy*, interest in eugenics increased exponentially in Britain and the United States. In the same year that Webster published *Daddy-Long-Legs*, the first worldwide International Eugenics Conference was held in London, hosted by the British Eugenics Education Society, which shared many members with the Fabian Society. In *Dear Enemy*, Sallie is the daughter of a titan of industry (and implicitly capitalism’s child), who takes on the task of reforming college friend Judy’s old orphan asylum. She throws herself into the task, but even as she institutes reforms to improve the lives of the orphans, she finds herself increasingly fascinated and disturbed by eugenics studies presented to her by the asylum doctor. Instead, the epistle’s promise to provide a written body that may be shaped or molded in any form disturbs Sallie. Ultimately, *Dear Enemy* counters much of the work of *Daddy-Long-Legs*, which saw the epistle’s mutability for its promise, rather than its peril. Several influential works on eugenics leave a clear impression on *Dear Enemy*. Most potent was Henry Goddard’s dubious case study, *The Kallikak Family* (1912), which argued that the “feeble-minded” were genetically doomed to breed other mentally disabled people and burden society.<sup>37</sup> Grounding my analysis in contemporary publications on eugenics, I argue that, ultimately, the Fabian gains made in *Daddy-Long-Legs* take a deeply troubled turn in *Dear Enemy*, a narrative that implies that the future of sound social reform involves the permanent removal of all those whose bodies or, as Sallie terms it, “unspeakable heredity,” deviate from a perceived genetic normalcy.

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<sup>36</sup> C. H. C. Osborne, “Why I Have Resigned from the Fabian Society,” *Nursling* 9 (October 1911): 32.

<sup>37</sup> Henry Goddard, *The Kallikak Family* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912).

Overall, this dissertation claims that this trio of women writers developed a Fabian brand of imaginative literature that prioritized—and legitimized—the experiences of children and young adults. Their writing invites children to examine, critique, and even dismantle generic limitations and Victorian ideologies. Sharp, Nesbit, and Webster all are, at their core, very different Fabian writers. Their disparate approaches to literary writing parallel a distinct Fabian strain of individualism, but what remains significant about their work, especially when juxtaposed with their political achievements, is that each of these writers invites child readers to invent, in Byatt’s words, “their own separate, largely independent lives, as children.”

## Chapter One

### “The Antithesis of Cricket”:

#### Gender, Cross-Dressing, and Non-Normative Bodies in the Works of Evelyn Sharp

##### The Body Made Politic in the Fabian Battle for Social Reform

When the Oscar Wilde trial shocked society into an extreme of prudishness never exceeded in the earliest days of the good Queen, one London daily started a shilling cricket fund to which panic-stricken citizens hastened to contribute lest their sexual normality should be doubted—the connection was subtle but felt at the same time to be real—the idea gained ground that the “Yellow Book” had stood in some way or another for everything that was the antithesis of cricket.<sup>1</sup>

In the above passage from her autobiography *Unfinished Adventure* (1933), Evelyn Sharp revisits the trial that sent Oscar Wilde to jail and makes clear her utter contempt for the society that condemned him. As those familiar with the fin de siècle know, on 25 May 1895 Wilde was convicted of committing acts of gross indecency with other men. For this crime, which the eleventh section of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 specified, Wilde received the maximum sentence of two years in solitary confinement with hard labor. At the end of Wilde’s

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Sharp, *Unfinished Adventure: Selected Reminiscences from an Englishwoman’s Life* (London: The Bodley Head Limited, 1933), 57.

failed libel suit against the Marquess of Queensberry (a failure that precipitated the Crown's prosecution of Wilde for committing acts of "gross indecency" with other men) newspapers erroneously reported that a yellow-covered book that Wilde carried as he exited from the Old Bailey was a copy of the *Yellow Book*, the publisher John Lane's most notorious publication.<sup>2</sup> Until Wilde's jail sentence, this quarterly publication—which featured modern poetry, fiction, prose, and art—combined fairly traditional writings with much more experimental work, including Sharp's, that took certain risks, especially with regard to sexual matters. The inclusion of such provocative works as the English poet Arthur Symonds's "Stella Maris"—a monologue in which a male speaker implicitly compares a female prostitute to the Virgin Mary—came to a decisive end when the now-scandalous Wilde, who never published in the magazine, was thought to be one of its avid readers. The two succeeding criminal trials ruined Wilde and ultimately had devastating consequences for the *Yellow Book*, tainted by association. The scandal surrounding Wilde, which exposed his involvement with a homosexual subculture that included blackmailers and male sex workers, was so intense that in May 1895 the British Museum announced that it was withdrawing all of his works from its Reading Room. Lane, it is worth noting had issued several of Wilde's volumes, including his one-tragedy, *Salome* (1894), to

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<sup>2</sup> J. Lewis May observes: "Wilde had failed in his libel action against the Marquess of Queensberry and the first thing that greeted his eyes were the headlines in the Sunday newspapers announcing in huge letters. 'Arrest of Oscar Wilde, Yellow Book under his arm.' It was a rise shock. 'It killed The Yellow Book, and it nearly killed me,' John Lane used to say" (*John Lane and the Nineties* [London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1936] 80). May erroneously identifies the book that Wilde had tucked under his arm as the French poet Pierre Louÿs' *Aphrodite*. Louÿs' book was not published until 1896. It is not known which "yellow book" Wilde was carrying, though it is likely it was a yellow-wrapped French novel.

which the Lord Chamberlain's office refused to grant a license for performance, since the censor Edward Smyth Pigott deemed that the play was "half-Biblical, half-pornographic."<sup>3</sup>

The conservative *Daily Telegraph*, capitalizing on the hysteria surrounding male sexuality and the concurrent national excitement over legendary cricketer W. G. Grace's athletic prowess, established the shilling fund that Sharp mentions. Although he does not make the connection Sharp establishes between the fund's success and the anxiety surrounding Wilde's trial for homosexual acts, sports historian Simon Rae writes: "The public exhibited a frenzy of enthusiasm, which the canny proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph* seized upon to launch a shilling fund to which, it seemed, everyone in the land, from the Prime Minister to the meanest schoolboy, subscribed. This second national testimonial reached the dizzy heights of £10,000."<sup>4</sup> Sharp was hardly alone in seeing a clear link between the shilling fund and rampant anti-Wilde illiberality. Even the Yellow Dwarf, a fictional persona of Henry Harland, makes a glancing reference to the *Daily Telegraph* shilling testimonial in the October edition of the *Yellow Book* following Wilde's trials.<sup>5</sup> As a result of the new need for men to prove their heterosexuality, gender conformity became especially heightened for men during this charged political moment. As the policing of male behavior increased dramatically, however, new opportunities arose for their female counterparts, argues Linda K. Hughes in her scholarship on the *Yellow Book*. Hughes contends that the scouring of men's work for anything suspect meant that women had more leeway with their own writing, particularly those women writing for the now infamous

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<sup>3</sup> Pigott's remark, which he confided to Spencer Ponsonby, is quoted in John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama, 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 112.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Rae, *It's Not Cricket: A History of Skullduggery, Sharp Practice, and Downright Cheating in the Noble Game* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2012), 91, iBooks.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Harland, "Books: A Letter to the Editor," *Yellow Book* 7 (October 1895): 126-27.



Bodley Head quarterly. Hughes notes: “The [Wilde] trial was a reminder of the high stakes of masculinity in securing bourgeois regimes of gender and morality; women, already marginal, could more safely articulate thoughts that had become dangerous for men.”<sup>6</sup> Sharp clearly articulates her dismay at Wilde’s humiliation and her repugnance for the contemporaries that condemned him and the outcomes of Wilde’s incarceration. Sharp wryly expresses her disgust by drawing attention to the bizarre false proofs of sexuality that became a subject of public fixation in response to the scandal surrounding Wilde’s name. Though Wilde did not, in actuality, carry the *Yellow Book* into his trial, the public was correct that the writers working with Henry Harland and Aubrey Beardsley were not figures bound by tradition or conservative values. Sharp’s movement within the *Yellow Book* coterie meant socializing with many individuals performing non-normative gender roles. Fellow *Yellow Book* writer and sub-editor Ella D’Arcy, too, made one such reference in a reflection on the social circle surrounding the Bodley Head’s most infamous publication when she mentions “Arthur Symons looking like a girl, with yellow hair, and pink and white cheeks.”<sup>7</sup>

Several important points are embedded in Sharp’s rich observation about the way in which the *Yellow Book* became part of a binary of non-normative and normative. She demonstrates how sexual normalcy places demands on men exclusively—even the New Woman, as this independent-minded figure became known in 1894, need not cast shillings at symbolic cricket funds. By establishing this fund, the *Daily Telegraph* indicated that what was mostly deeply at risk in society was masculinity and male heterosexuality. That male readers might

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<sup>6</sup> Linda K. Hughes, “Women Poets and Contested Spaces in the *Yellow Book*,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 44, no. 4 (Autumn 2004): 859, accessed 11 April 2015. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/sel/summary/v044/44.4hughes.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Ella D’Arcy, “*Yellow Book* Celebrities,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 37, no. 1 (1994): 37. Project Muse.

believe their gender was so imperiled perhaps indicates that fin-de-siècle male heterosexual masculinity was far more precarious than previously imagined by Victorians.

In this chapter, I explore several of Sharp's remarkable fairy tales that point to the need to revise the genre for the purpose of reimagining not only Wildean figures, but also traditional segregations that divide men and women. Within the framework of these non-normative gender behaviors and interactions as the "antithesis of cricket," I examine how Sharp critiques sexual normalcy and social demands placed on boys and girls with regard to conventional ideals of masculinity and femininity. My particular interest is in the Fabian politics that inform Sharp's radical ventures into richly imaginative stories that imagine diverse reforms: acceptance of the cross-dressed body; transgender identity in children; recognizing the agency of the disabled; the end of English blood sports; and improvements to tenement housing.

Given her wide range of political interests, Sharp found a natural home for her early work in the *Yellow Book*, and her commentary on Wilde's sentencing provides a locus for her career-long interest in the social oppression of anyone attempting to diverge from the ruthless social enforcement of gender.<sup>8</sup> First, I address the significance of socialist homophile campaigner Edward Carpenter's friendship with Sharp, especially the significance of his extraordinarily progressive perspectives in his writings on dissident styles of gender performance and sexual identification. Thereafter, in order to reveal how radical Sharp's approach was to non-normative embodiments of gender, I engage with Susan Stryker's recent scholarship on transgender history, with Deborah Gorham's historical research on Victorian femininity, and Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough's critical examination of the history and pathologizing of cross-dressing. As I

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Harland's quarterly periodical included the work of many Fabians before folding in 1897 in the wake of the Wilde Trials and Wilde's subsequent imprisonment.

demonstrate, throughout her writing career Sharp revisited the constraints that normative styles of gender performance can place on children, women, and men. In her fiction from the 1890s and early 1900s, whenever Sharp delves into the worlds of fairyland and the English countryside, she raises questions about the ways in which adult expectations surrounding a binary coding of feminine and masculine behavior negatively impact a child's right to self-determination, particularly through gender identification.

Sharp was a lifelong member of the Fabian Society, and her ventures into the fairytale genre in the name of rethinking what femininity and masculinity could mean for the modern child remain in close dialogue with the Fabians' most courageous proponents of radical and transformative sexual attitudes. The Fabian Society embraced what were (by Victorian standards) non-normative gender identifications and sexual practices, and had several openly gay members, including Carpenter, but also struggled constantly to clarify their ideas about sexuality to the outside public.<sup>9</sup> Angela V. John, the leading authority on Sharp's literary and political career, notes the link that suffragists such as Sharp had to progressive social reformers and thinkers: "The ideas of the sexual radical, socialist and author Edward Carpenter would also have influenced her thinking. Carpenter was a close friend of both Evelyn and [her intimate friend] Henry [Nevinson]. He held, and put into practice in his own life, progressive ideas about the transformation of social and gender relations, underpinned by a commitment to spiritual freedom

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<sup>9</sup> When the Fabian Women's Group held a lecture series in 1908, their pamphlet covering the event spent its first several pages in extended self-justification about the frank discussion of sex that occurred during the lectures and despite knowing that the pamphlet was only for circulation among members: "In the following pages the words 'free sexual relations,' 'sexual freedom,' etc., do not mean illicit sexual relations or sexual licentiousness any more than the words 'free trade' mean smuggling, or 'free speech' profanity and falsehood" (Corrected proof copy, *Summary of Seven Papers and Discussions upon the Disabilities of Women as Workers*, box E, folder 111, item 4, Fabian Society Papers, 1, London School of Economics Library, London, UK.).

and a belief in people enjoying closer harmony with their inner nature and nature itself.”<sup>10</sup> The child and adult characters occupying this space outside traditional gender roles heavily populate Sharp’s fiction, especially her fairy tales. Sharp’s friendship with Carpenter likely would have reinforced Sharp’s belief that the problems resulting from society’s rigid adherence to a binary gender performance extended far back into childhood. In her biography of Carpenter, Sheila Rowbotham writes: “Already at ten he was disrupting assumed gender roles by trying to play the piano. They would exercise female authority by hustling him off the piano stool; whereas they had to acquire music as an accomplishment, it was regarded as inappropriate for a boy.”<sup>11</sup> At a period when the overall culture in Britain portrayed childhood and especially girlhood as an idyllic state, Sharp, like the English poet Christina Rossetti, rejected this trend. Never one to romanticize childhood, Sharp writes: “Childhood, at its worst, is unhappy; at best, it is uncomfortable.”<sup>12</sup> This refusal to imagine the Victorian or Edwardian child as the inhabitant of an idealized world allows her stories to root out the source of the unhappiness and ultimately link it to a critical socialist dilemma, one innately connected to contemporary attitudes toward non-normative gender identity and performance.

Certainly, when it came to sexual equality as related to issues of gender and suffragism, mixed opinions reigned within the Society. At one end were the suffragist members of the Fabian Women’s Group, repeatedly holding meetings to empower women as earners and

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<sup>10</sup> Angela V. John, *Rebel Woman, 1869-1955* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 125. Henry Nevinson was a journalist and married man who sustained an affair with Sharp over several decades, eventually marrying Sharp after the death of his wife in 1933.

<sup>11</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Evelyn Sharp, *Fairy Tales: As They Are, as They Were, and as They Should Be* (Brighton: D. B. Friend, 1889). 1.

citizens. At the other end of the spectrum were Fabians who condemned suffragism, arguing that its proponents distracted from the greater socialist cause or, among this latter group, those whose gender politics appear bizarrely conservative. In December 1911, G. F. B. Sharp wrote for the Fabian publication the *Nursling* (a Fabian periodical for younger members to explore socialism): “the cult of the body must not be discouraged. It is imperative that semi-nudity should not be forbidden in our Music Halls—the evening continuation Schools of the populace. In these days of physical deterioration it is imperative that perfect specimens of manhood and of womanhood (poised though corset-less) should be encouraged to display themselves for public admiration and imitation,” an assertion followed almost immediately by this statement, which I mentioned in the introduction: “Frankly, I distrust the influence of women in politics, municipal or national.”<sup>13</sup> I cite this passage not to draw attention to G. F. B. Sharp’s misogyny, but rather to highlight the diversity of personalities and opinions that managed to thrive within Fabianism, as noted by Ian Britain, a scholar who has written extensively on the Society.<sup>14</sup> G. F. B. Sharp posits the male body and female body as having Platonic forms that serve as a sight for spectacle and emulation. His proposed scheme for displaying the body as an aesthetic object for the eager and likely male gaze (as the majority of semi-nude Music Hall performers were women) works in direct opposition to Fabians like Evelyn Sharp, who portray the body and the soul as highly individualized.

The debates over the place of gender, sexuality, and suffragist concerns within the Fabian Society underscore a far greater rift from other versions of socialism—that between individualism and collectivism. The first instances of this growing divide among socialists

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<sup>13</sup> G. F. B. Sharp, “The Cult of the Body,” *Nursling* 11 (December 1911): 10.

<sup>14</sup> See Ian Britain, *Fabianism and Culture: A Study in British Socialism and the Arts c. 1884-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 28.

sprout up repeatedly in *Seed-Time*, the journal of the Fellowship of the New Life from which the Fabian Society sprang. One member of the Fellowship of the New Life, E. D. Girdlestone, makes a direct attack on the British educational system and cites individualism as the undoing of socialistic thought: “This evil systems preys, just like a worm, upon the roots of Socialistic effort, and its influence will greatly tend, as I believe, to retard the evolution of a really Social system, our children being directly trained in Individualism faster than we succeed in winning adults to the camp of Socialism.”<sup>15</sup> One anonymous Fabian submitted a vitriolic column, “Individualism on Masquerade,” to *Seed-Time* in which the writer blames the Fellowship’s internal strife over the conflicting desires for private freedom and public collectivism: “Mr. Shaw’s position, as I understand it, is one of pure, unadulterated individualism; and that he should be taken by himself and others for a leader in the Socialist movement is the most ironical feature of the present singular and bewildering situation.”<sup>16</sup> The article pursues its argument, suggesting that Shaw’s embrace of individualism comes at the inevitable cost of collectivism, which is necessary to forward socialist goals. Ultimately, the author finishes the inflamed missive with the declaration that “Mr. Shaw’s economic conclusions are those of Socialism, but his underlying philosophy is that of eighteenth century negation and individualism, tricked out in a certain audacious nineteenth century gar and phrase, pleasing to many simply because it is new.”<sup>17</sup> One year after the anonymously penned *Seed-Time* article, Wilde published his most famous socialist text, “The Soul of Man under Socialism” (1891), in which he argues that

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<sup>15</sup> E. D. Girdlestone, “Education and Socialism,” *Seed-Time* 8 (April 1891): 7.

<sup>16</sup> [Anon.], “Individualism on Masquerade,” *Seed-Time* 6 (October 1890): 11.

<sup>17</sup> [Anon.] “Individualism on Masquerade,” 11.

socialism would lead to individualism.<sup>18</sup> Sharp's work deftly explores a crucial question arising from both her approach childhood and her commitment to socialism: How can the individual exercise her or his right to operate outside gender paradigms when the collective opinion insists on a framework that contradicts the needs and experiences of the individual? Strikingly, Sharp's fairy stories and children's books make the inverse argument: that individualism fully realized enables the pursuit of the collective good.

Though the Fabians did not have a single guiding ideology regarding socialism and the arts, the idea that art and literature might be critical conduits for socialist thought are reiterated constantly among the Society's members. As referenced in the introduction to this dissertation, Fabian thought about a specific policy for socialist intervention in the arts had circulated both publicly and privately among the Society's members. In his letter to Fabian secretary Edward Pease, Holbrook Jackson articulates his desire to see the Fabian Society expand the scope of its influence through the arts: "The F. S. in the past has created a definite Socialist attitude in both Politics & Sociology. Why not do the same for ART and PHILOSOPHY? These seem to me two necessary and legitimate fields for Fabian work."<sup>19</sup> I revisit this quotation to note that Jackson's letter reflects a Society-wide interest in the ways in which art, including literature, that feature Fabian ideas might prove a more effective way of disseminating the Society's message and mission: "I need not elaborate my suggestion in this letter—but briefly my wish is to see the Society forming itself into groups not alone dictated by the accidents of locality but in reference to ideas—and Art, Philosophy, Science and Politics seem to me the main ideas under which

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<sup>18</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1912), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Holbrook Jackson to Edward Pease, 11 December 1906, box B, folder 5, item 51, Fabian Society Papers.

social endeavor falls and therefore the most worthy of Fabian exploitation for Socialism.”<sup>20</sup> The Society did not follow Jackson’s suggestions in any formal capacity, but Sharp’s body of work consistently raises questions borne out of Fabian and suffragist interests. I do not mean to argue that Sharp’s work should be read as propaganda—her stories carefully avoid didactic, heavily constructed conclusions in favor of unsettling generic conventions. Her canon does not serve to instruct, but to destabilize cultural assumptions and draw attention to how rigid moral constructions around gender negatively impact individualism which, as previously argued, serves to advance socialism. Essentially, personal freedoms may work toward egalitarian economics.

In the discussion that follows, I show that Sharp’s stories that focus on troubled and troubling gender performances and identity—“The Boy Who Looked like a Girl” (1897), “The Little Queen and the Gardener” (1900), and *The Other Boy* (1902)—arise from this particular Fabian tension between individual freedom and collectivist politics. First, I examine Sharp’s treatise on the fairy tale genre and place it in conversation with “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” which portrays gender performance as malleable and highly constructed. Following a discussion of Boy’s cross-dressing and gender crisis, I move to “The Little Queen and the Gardener,” one of Sharp’s non-anthologized tales that focuses on the magical, gender-exaggerating modifications of the titular characters. Finally, I turn to Sharp’s children’s novel, *The Other Boy*, in which questions of non-normative gender identity and performance migrate from fairyland to the middle-class Edwardian home in Sharp’s most aggressive fictional examination of transgendered identity and male effeminacy.

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<sup>20</sup> Jackson to Pease, 11 December 1906, Fabian Society Papers.



## The Battle for Fairyland: Non-Normative Boyhood in “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl”

During the nineteenth century, a continual debate festered about the nature of the fairy tale and its development or (according to the arguments of some) appropriation, during the latter part of the century. Charles Dickens threw the most influential early gauntlet in his essay, “Frauds on the Fairies” (1853) in *Household Words*, about which critic Elaine Ostry notes: “In ‘Frauds on the Fairies,’ Dickens criticizes didactic children’s literature while making a few points about morality himself. Written in response to George Cruikshank’s revision of ‘Hop o’ My Thumb’ (1853), this essay defends the value of the imagination and of the fairy tale in terms that show a strong romantic tendency. ‘Frauds’ most clearly outlines Dickens’s views on the fairy tale, and shows that he considered it a vital literary form.”<sup>21</sup> Beyond a critique of didacticism, however, was an implicit condemnation of a modernization of the fairy tale that rooted a traditional tale in a specific temporal and political moment. After providing an example of a “modern” Cinderella, Dickens writes: “Frauds on the Fairies once permitted, we see little reason why they may not come to this, and great reason why they may. The Vicar of Wakefield was wisest when he was tired of being always wise. The world is too much with us, early and late. Leave this precious old escape from it, alone.”<sup>22</sup> Dickens, however, was not without his own inconsistencies. Caroline Sumpter, who has written extensively on debates about fairy tales in Victorian periodicals, observes that Dickens himself violated his own rules in highly politicized adaptations of famous tales, most notably his retelling of “Aladdin” in “The One Thousand and One Humbugs,” and that Dickens’ anxieties reemerge in Ruskin’s preface to a

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<sup>21</sup> Elaine Ostry, *Social Dreaming: Dickens and the Fairy Tale* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 30.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Dickens, “Fraud on the Fairies,” *Household Words* 8, no. 184 (1 October 1853): 100.

Taylor and Cruikshank edition of fairy tales.<sup>23</sup> Dickens' core argument echoes a half-century later in Sharp's own cry for the fairy tale to sustain its timeless universality even as Sharp, like Dickens, brings contemporary political concerns to the genre.<sup>24</sup>

Sharp makes a distinct foray into the great fairy tale debate with her argument that because fairy tales wield such powerful moral influence, they must eschew simplistic moralism. By the 1890s, the battle for the fairy tale genre returned with renewed vigor. Sharp enters the fray with the declaration that the fairy tale provides a means of communicating difference and tolerance: "The very fact of living in a different world, peopled with a different race of diminutive folk, raises us out of our ourselves and unconsciously does us good. Fairy tales sharpen and feed our imagination, and by so doing they increase and strengthen our best parts. Moreover, they actually exercise a direct influence on our characters."<sup>25</sup> Sharp takes a traditional argument for didacticism—the need to maintain a strict moral standard precisely because such works wield influence—and flips it on its head, a very Fabian approach as she inverts the familiar but does not abandon form entirely. She goes on to suggest that appropriating the genre for conveying a transparent, contemporary parable compromises the very access and

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<sup>23</sup> Caroline Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 27.

<sup>24</sup> Tom Shippey discusses this history more extensively. Shippey cites George Macdonald's "The Light Princess" (1864), Dickens' "The Magic Fishbone" (1868), and A. A. Milne's "Prince Rabbit" (1925) as stories that are caught between genre and audience as fundamentally casual and generically discomfited stories: "All these stories are, in a word, anachronistic: they never lose the sense of the Victorian/Edwardian world of their tellers in the timeless world of the fairy tale. They are also consistently condescending. J. R. R. Tolkien summed them up well in his influential 1947 essay 'On Fairy Stories.'" He notes Tolkien's particular attack on Lang for these faults. See Shippey, "Rewriting the Core: Transformations of the Fairy-Tale in Modern Feminist Writing," in Anna Chaudhri and Hilda Ellis-Davidson, eds., *A Companion to the Fairy-Tale* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2003), 250-51.

<sup>25</sup> Sharp, *Fairy Tales: As They Are, as They Were, and as They Should Be*, 2.

transformation provided by fairy stories: “[Such stories are] Metaphysical disquisitions, in which the ogres have become vegetarians, and the wizards are transformed into spiritualists; delusive discourses, in which the old-fashioned magician is an argumentative Free Thinker, and the time-worn dwarf is a Home Ruler in disguise; stories which would require a matured brain, with a taste for conundrums, to unravel.”<sup>26</sup> The loss of universality, which Sharp critiques, consequently entails the alienation of child readers. She cites Hans Christian Andersen’s *Tin Soldier*, *Snow Queen*, and the *Little Mermaid* as the recent fairy tale inventions that can withstand modernization and maintain their magic. The essay dismisses the various incarnations of *Cinderella*, and *Rumpelstiltskin* as doomed to fall away. Not tied to specific political propositions or as caricatures of contemporaries, Sharp argues, Andersen’s stories eschew staid didacticism in favor of a symbolism open to interpretation: “There is nothing artificial about Andersen; his is pure, honest, kindly humor, with a vein of poetry and pathos running through it all. He never preaches a moral; as children, we read his tales and profit by their very beauty; but when we have passed the age of credulity, we begin to see something more in them. There are no sermons in as many words, but lessons there are aplenty if we choose to learn them.” The timing of Sharp’s foray into the Great Fairy Tale Debate managed to coincide with perhaps the most important fairy tale publication of the century: “In the same year that Evelyn expressed her initial thoughts on fairy tales, the prolific and versatile Scottish writer Andrew Lang, aided by his wife Leonora, published *The Blue Fairy Book* [1900], the first volume in his series of ‘colour’ books. Although the 1860s had seen an outpouring of fairy fiction in Britain (often in magazine stories by women), between 1889 and 1910 Lang’s series, along with Christina Rossetti’s poem

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<sup>26</sup> Sharp, *Fairy Tales: As They Are, as They Were, and as They Should Be*, 3.

‘The Goblin Market’, played an important part in reviving and codifying fairy tales.”<sup>27</sup>

Rossetti’s poem bears the most relevance in this chapter as the story of the two embeds within it sharply separate spheres for women and men with the domestic space acting as a place of vivid refuge from the brutality of the hypermasculine marketplace that threatens to destroy sororal companionship. The tales of Sharp’s that I examine in this chapter seek not to reinforce these separate spheres but break them down by interrogating how gendered spaces enforce brutal divisions rather than providing sanctuaries. By chipping away at the fairy as Fabians chipped away at law, Sharp approaches the fairy tale as a reformer, not a revolutionary.

The fairy tale provided Sharp with a genre already primed for reconstruction with its conventions and generic trademarks. By the early twentieth century, fairy tale debate even made its way to the Great Exhibition in London. Adrienne E. Gavin and Mark F. Humphries note: “Greville MacDonald lectured on ‘The Educational Value of the Fairy Tale’ at both Exhibitions, presumably following the idea of ‘fairy sense’ espoused in his ‘The Fairy Tale in Education’ (1913). MacDonald’s argument for fairy-tale reading is allied to a Christian education, in that fairy tales introduce children to ways of thinking which are necessary for the appropriate understanding of Biblical stories. ‘Fairy sense’ is to be encouraged, it is as ‘innate as the religious sense itself.’”<sup>28</sup> Sharp, though, writes stories from a specifically non-Christian context (though guided by a Christian moralism, that moralism does not serve didactic purposes) and highlights the complex moral and political concerns that arise from a culture in which gender and class allow for rigid segregation. Sharp advocates for the child through allowing the child to define himself or herself as a social participant. This recognition of childhood agency, though

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<sup>27</sup> John, *Rebel Woman*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries, *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction: World Enough and Time* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 133.

revolutionary in Sharp's fiction, came more into mainstream consideration in the 1910s. The welfare of children in and outside of magical worlds came into sharper focus toward the onset of the First World War: "Despite the tenacity of Fairyland, the suffragist and women's 'issues' focus of the 1914 Exhibition suggest that the welfare of the child is dependent less on the maintaining of a separate and precious child identity, and more on the child as a player in a social network of oppression and struggle."<sup>29</sup> Sharp bridges fairyland and this "social network." The contention that fairyland existed untangled from real world concerns is the true fantasy. Nicola Bown, who has written extensively on the Victorian imagery and storytelling surrounding fairies, claims: "Fairies probably never helped the Victorians make important moral, political, economic or religious decisions; they never sprinkled fairy dust over poverty, disease, oppression, cruelty or neglect; there is neither call nor need in fairyland for empire or reform."<sup>30</sup> Bown's argument overlooks the iconographic artwork of Walter Crane, the stories of Wilde, and especially the work of writers like Sharp. In fact, childhood itself had come under scrutiny with new rigor during the time when Sharp's earliest fairy stories appear:

The period saw the Scout and Guide movements established in 1907 and 1910 respectively and Sigmund Freud's 'Essay on Infantile Sexuality' (1905) challenging the innocence of childhood. To an extent never before seen children became the focus of legal, medical, literary, psychological, sexological, anthropological, political, sociological, anti-Victorian, and nationalistic interest. The Edwardian construction of childhood drew on Rousseauian and Romantic ideas about the benefits of the natural world but also integrally responded to

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<sup>29</sup> Gavin and Humphries, *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction*, 131.

<sup>30</sup> Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11.

matters at hand: Empire at its height but under evident threat, standardized education, legislative will towards the child, and child-like imagination as a palliative to the rushing mechanized city and a scientific age.<sup>31</sup>

Yet the Edwardian construction of childhood is one which, Sharp's fiction suggests, needs to be addressed a threat to individualism and, ultimately, socialism itself.

Even from the foundations of the Society in the Fellowship of the New Life, Fabians understood that many social institutions, particularly educational systems, required reconstruction to ignite a political reformation of Britain. In *Seed-Time*, Alice Woods reviewed Edward Bellamy's famous socialist work *Looking Backward* (1888) and reiterated a popular Fabian refrain: "Our methods of education surely lie at the very root of all the social changes that are brought about. If we only knew how to educate our children and youths, so as to draw forth the very best of which they are capable, producing thereby a world of men and women on a far higher level than any we dream of now, many of the social questions, so perplexing to us a present, would solve themselves."<sup>32</sup> The education and, in some of the stories I mention below, reeducation of Sharp's protagonists present a model of gender equity that would allow for the socialist cause to advance. In her biography of Sharp, John briefly mentions Sharp's treatise on the fairy tale genre: "Somewhat conservative in its approach, this essay nevertheless made clear her conviction that imagination and a sense of magic mattered when writing for children."<sup>33</sup> "The Boy Who Looked like a Girl" might be considered a template for how a process of

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<sup>31</sup> Gavin and Humphries, *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Alice Woods, "Education in *Looking Backward*," *Seed-Time* 3 (January 1890): 8.

<sup>33</sup> John, *Rebel Woman*, 23.

reeducation—in this instance the restructuring of social constructions of gender—is necessary for the inclusion of all children, ergo all citizens.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Legitimacy of Gender: “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl” and *The Other Boy***

“The Boy Who Looked like a Girl” reveals the conflict driving its story through its apt title.<sup>35</sup> Boy, the protagonist whose gender and identity have been conflated utterly in his very name, sets out on a quest to find a land of boys after he has experienced frustration with the feminine domestic space of his nursery. Boy travels clad in a smock, as a result of which the creatures and beings that inhabit fairyland mistake him for a girl. The story follows Boy’s numerous thwarted attempts to have others recognize his gender in the way that he does. Finally reaching the domain of boys called the Land of Bad Weather, Boy finds not a fraternal utopia, but instead a place of chaotic noise and violence. Disturbed and unable to assimilate to the culture of boyhood, Boy happens upon a misplaced girl: the Fine Weather Fairy, whose attempts to flee the sororal Land of Fine Weather has stranded her in the Land of Bad Weather. The Fine Weather Fairy immediately trusts Boy, believing him to be a girl. Boy, once he has revealed to her that he is not a girl, nonetheless befriends the fairy and finally has a compatriot able to remove his much-despised smock. Together, Boy and the Fine Weather Fairy escape the boys whose companionship Boy so desperately sought and travel to the realm of the Sun Queen, where Boy learns that he is denied sanctuary as he is not, as he has been trying to prove by

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<sup>34</sup> “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl” appeared decades before Britain achieved suffrage for women, but Sharp clearly considered girls as citizens, even if her government had not yet acknowledged this position and its accordant rights.

<sup>35</sup> Evelyn Sharp, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” in *Wymps and Other Fairy Tales* (London: The Bodley Head, 1897), 69.

resuming his smock, a girl. Ultimately, Boy realizes that he cannot hold a place in either universe.

Caught between the worlds of boyhood and girlhood—fallacies in their very segregation, Sharp’s narrator asserts—Boy acts as a sort of prototype for the intermediate sex that Sharp’s friend and ally Carpenter would later write of his 1908 radical work of sexology of that name. Several of Carpenter’s earlier writings on sexuality and the family also resound in parts of Sharp’s fairy tale, which coheres with the attitudes toward sexual liberty and gender of Fabian counterparts. Carpenter’s 1894 essay on the problems of marriage in a society highly stratified by gender resonates with the same concerns that beleaguer the protagonist of “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl.” Carpenter writes:

Behind the relation of any individual man and woman to each other stands the historical age-evolved relation of the two sexes generally, spreading round and enclosing the former on all sides, and creating the social environment from which the individuals can hardly escape. Two young people in the present day may come together, but their relation is already largely determined by causes over which they have no control. As a rule they know but little of each other; society has kept the two sexes apart; the boy and the girl have been brought up along different lines; they hardly understand each other's nature; their mental interests and occupations are different; and as they grow up their worldly interests and advantage are seen to be different, often opposed; public opinion separates their



spheres and their rights and their duties, and their honor and their dishonor very sharply from each other.<sup>36</sup>

Couched in language of imprisonment and escape, Carpenter's description of gender is one that Boy's experience largely recapitulates. Like the person whom Carpenter describes, Boy sees gendered identity (when it is not the gender with which he identifies) as an imprisonment. To him, the smock is a garment that carries sexual significations entirely beyond his control. The essence of Carpenter's claim, though, also contains a problematic declaration that, because of this separation of spheres, men and women's "mental interests and occupations are different." Carpenter's assertion noticeably fails to address the number of men and women—Carpenter himself and Sharp among them—who diverge from this structure, in spite of its prevalence and influence. It took Carpenter several years to understand more fully the sexual phenomena that fin-de-siècle homophile theorists, such as John Addington Symonds, and sexologist Havelock Ellis, increasingly defined as sexual inversion. A century later, their discoveries were recast within the now-familiar discourse of transgender identity, which has increasingly alerted modern culture to the potential instability and transitivity of gender identification.

Fourteen years after completing *Marriage in a Free Society*, Carpenter opened *The Intermediate Sex* with an epigraph from Otto Weininger, an Austrian misogynist and virulent anti-Semite,<sup>37</sup> who nonetheless framed his repellent biases in an influential and far-reaching discussion of the feminine and masculine, observing that these genders might be contemplated as

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<sup>36</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Marriage in Free Society* (Manchester: The Labour Press Society Limited, 1894), 5-6.

<sup>37</sup> Weininger converted from Judaism to Christianity and dismissed his former religion as feminine, ergo passive and irreligious. He also associates femininity in his work with negative traits rooted in gender stereotypes, even as he suggests that masculine and feminine have a spectrum of behaviors between them.

part of a spectrum rather than two poles. Though Carpenter hardly embraced all of Weininger's views, he found a useful metaphor in Weininger's reflections on masculinity and femininity in *Geschlecht und Charakter* (1903), which Carpenter translated as follows:

There are transitional forms between the metals and non-metals; between chemical combinations and simple mixtures, between animals and plants, between phanerogams and cryptogams, and between mammals and birds... The improbability may henceforth be taken for granted of finding in Nature a sharp cleavage between all that is masculine on the one side and all that is feminine on the other; or that any living being is so simple in this respect that it can be put wholly on one side, or wholly on the other, of the line.<sup>38</sup>

The point of transition provides a helpful frame of reference for comprehending the experiences of those individuals who find themselves located between presentations or performances of gender that do not have congruence with the ones expected to relate to their anatomical sex. In *The Intermediate Sex*, Carpenter draws out in explicit terms the problem that Sharp returns to repeatedly in her fiction:

It is beginning to be recognized that the sexes do not or should not normally form two groups hopelessly isolated in habit and feeling from each other, but that they rather represent the two poles of *one* group—which is the human race; so that while certainly the extreme specimens at either pole are vastly divergent, there are

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<sup>38</sup> Otto Weininger, quoted in Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921), 5.

great numbers in the middle region who (though differing corporeally as men and women) are by emotion and temperament very near to each other.<sup>39</sup>

To be sure, the works that I analyze within this chapter predate Carpenter's crucial observations. But it is clear from his strong presence in Sharp's milieu that his prescient understanding of gender as a spectrum rather than a sexual binary was already in circulation. Sharp's fiction, I argue, specifically sets out to give these intermediate figures a place at the forefront of the debates about gender. Boys who look like girls, girls that identify as boys, effeminate men, and tomboyish governesses populate her canon with rigor. Throughout, her fiction, both for children and for adults, Sharp relentlessly interrogates Victorian and Edwardian separation of gendered spheres and how these delineations unravel or, at times, how the failure to disintegrate the constructed boundaries between boy and girl and man and woman isolates individuals, thus positioning them outside the collectivist politics that were central to her socialist ideals.

"The Boy Who Looked like a Girl" immediately draws attention to the externalized construction of not only gender but also narration. When the omniscient third-person narrator begins the tale, the storytelling voice does not focus on the protagonist, Boy. Instead, the narrator initially presents the story through the eyes of the giant, a minor character. This giant, the narrator informs the reader, has a reputation for eating children, though he never does. Already, the break between expectation and reality sets up the gender dilemma that follows. As the giant goes about his day, a child approaches him: "looking through a crack in the tree, he saw a funny little figure in a blue linen smock, sitting on the ground outside."<sup>40</sup> Here, Sharp remolds

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<sup>39</sup> Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Sharp, "The Boy Who Looked like a Girl," 71.

the fairy tale through an aberration in perspective. First, she presents an opening where the reader must recognize dual alienation—one in which the reader first enters, perhaps even trespasses, into fairyland, signified by the presence of a magical character, and then sees Boy from the giant’s perspective, where the giant perceives the intruding human as a cipher. What should the giant make of the smock? What does this garment signify? As feminist theorist Judith Butler memorably observes in her influential study of gender performance: “persons only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility.”<sup>41</sup> Sharp’s story soon shifts focus from the giant to Boy and the latter’s struggles to become sexually intelligible to others in a way that reconciles with his own identification with as male.

Clad in a sailor suit complete with knickerbockers and the overlapping androgynous smock, Boy represents the most popular children’s fashion of the 1890s. Clothing historian Anne Buck remarks that the sailor suit gained unprecedented popularity after the Prince of Wales appeared in the outfit when the German mid-century and portraitist F. X. Winterhalter immortalized the iconic style in *Edward VII when Prince of Wales* (1846).<sup>42</sup> Buck notes that in addition to the enduring popularity of the sailor suit toward the end of the nineteenth century, the smock also became a popular covering for children in spite of the condescending commentary of the periodical, the *Lady’s World*. Evidence suggests that the wearers themselves experienced a certain disenchantment with this item of clothing: “A number of these small replica smocks can be seen in museums, most of them showing few signs of wear, so children probably rejected

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<sup>41</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 22.

<sup>42</sup> Anne Buck, *Clothes and the Child: A Handbook of Children’s Dress in England 1500-1900* (Carlton: Ruth Bean, 1996), 122.

them too.”<sup>43</sup> The promotion of this fashionable unisex attire supplied reactionary conservatives with new ammunition when they dismissed the style and other suggestions of dress reform, which had gained increasing support since the 1880s. The character of Boy thus becomes caught in a sustained political battleground over the child’s clothed body and its proper gender presentation. Susan Stryker, who has conducted groundbreaking research on transgender history, notes the link between advances of suffragism in the late nineteenth century with reactionary attitudes about finding new, narrower ways to delineate sexual identity through clothing: “Nineteenth-century anti-feminist opinion, which saw in feminism a threatened loss of distinction between men and women, considered dress reform to be tantamount to cross-dressing.”<sup>44</sup> Sharp’s story subverts the notion of gendered dress by having Boy occupy both outfits in layers, literalizing gender as a construction on the male or female body. Cleverly, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl” plays with the loss of gender distinction in costume in order to show how these distinctions already are in the process of dissolving. The magical beings of fairyland, separated from the human world, amplify the satiric dressing and undressing in their attempts to use these preconceived and old-fashioned ideas about apparel to decode Boy’s gender.

Boy’s disorienting gender presentation, however, also has roots in multiple English folk customs that play on gender performance, with which Sharp—given her longstanding interest in traditional English dance, festivals, and songs—was familiar. When Boy finds the giant unconvinced, despite Boy’s repeated protestations, that Boy is a boy, Boy finally decides that a physical demonstration is the only proof he has:

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<sup>43</sup> Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, 129.

<sup>44</sup> Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), 35.

“But you’re half a girl yourself,” said the giant. “Look at your frock.”

“It isn’t a frock!” shouted Boy, angrily. “It’s only a top thing to go over all the others; and it if wasn’t fastened down the back with hooks, I should have taken it off long ago. When it’s buttons, I can do it by myself, but when it’s hooks, only Nurse can take it off. And this is one is hooks, don’t you see? I shall ask the first boy I meet, to take it off. Look!”

The giant did look; and Boy lifted up the linen smock, and showed his brown stockings and blue serge knickerbockers, underneath. “Ah,” said the giant; “most certainly you are a boy.”<sup>45</sup>

Troublingly, Boy must expose himself as part of his attempt to verify his gender. Even though he wears clothes beneath the feminine smock, the lifting of his skirts suggests an insidious violation of Boy’s right to assert his gender without laying his knickerbockers bare. Boy essentially performs a pantomime in which his costume renders him simultaneously boy and girl. His visible inhabiting of two gender identities evokes images of the half-woman, half-man “Betty” figure central to traditional English mummery, which is hardly surprising given the repeated appearance of cross-dressing appears in multiple traditional English rituals. Sharp had an extensive knowledge and lasting interest in English folk customs. In 1928, Sharp published a cultural history, *Here We Go Round: The Story of the Dance*. Sharp opens with a description of the 14 September Abbot’s Bromley horn dance and specifically mentions the cross-dressing character of Maid Marian: “from the same sanctuary the man-woman, here called Maid Marian—takes down an ancient wooden ladle [...] inhabitants are now at their doors, sharing in the ‘luck’ of the dance by standing there to see it performed and then dropping a coin into Maid

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<sup>45</sup> Sharp, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” 72.

Marian's wooden cup."<sup>46</sup> Charlotte S. Burne (1850-1923), a late Victorian scholar of Shropshire folktales and the first woman president of the Folklore Society (which included Andrew Lang, Alfred Nutt, and Edward Clodd among its membership), includes a photograph of the cross-dressed and mustachioed Maid Marian from the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance in her article on Staffordshire customs.<sup>47</sup> In East Kent, the Hodening, a Hallowtide figure, often appeared accompanied by a man dressed as an old woman, or Mollie.<sup>48</sup> The appearances of the man-and-woman figure consistently resurface in traditional, rural English festivals. Thomas Sternberg, a Victorian folklorist who studied Northamptonshire traditions in the mid-nineteenth century, observes with distaste how topsy-turvy cross-dressing plays a critical role in Tander, or St. Andrew's day feasts: "Toward evening the sober villagers appear to have become suddenly smitten with a violent taste for masquerading. Women may be seen walking about in male attire, while men and boys have donned the female dress."<sup>49</sup> Such Mollies, which were central to the queer subcultures of eighteenth-century London, even appeared as figures in Victorian brothels.<sup>50</sup> Sharp's history of the dance cites the man-woman figure as critical to the folk dance tradition and ancient fertility rites, but also notes that the figure has endured a cultural demotion in modern England:

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<sup>46</sup> Evelyn Sharp, *Here We Go Round: The Story of the Dance* (London: Gerald Howe Ltd., 1928), 1-2.

<sup>47</sup> C. S. Burne, "Staffordshire Folk and their Lore," *Folk-lore* 7.4 (1896): 366-86. Plate IV.

<sup>48</sup> Christina Hale, *British Folk Customs* (London: The Anchor Press, Ltd., 1976), 101. Hale also recounts the presence of a "Man-Woman" in the Horn Dance, though she suggests the Maid Marian designation appeared much later than the character him/herself (104).

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Sternberg, *Folklore of Northamptonshire* (London: John Russell Smith, 1851), 183-84.

<sup>50</sup> See Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap's Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England, 1700-1830*, second edition (Stroud: Chalford Press, 2006).

The many threads of tradition running through these sword dances are woven into the various names given to the additional characters who accompany the performers, both in the sword and morris dances. These usually include a man and a man-woman (i.e. a man dressed as a woman and sometimes masked), a couple reminiscent of fertility drama; and we find them severally termed King and Queen, Lord and Lady, Squire and Moll, Fool and Maid Marian, and so on; but the commonest titles are the impersonal Tom and Bessy (or 'Dirty Bet'), so that at one time the Northumbrian sword dancers were known as the 'Tommies and Bessies.' In the Winster processional dance the King and Queen who lead the dance are a decorous and dignified couple; but, generally speaking, the additional characters in England have degenerated into grotesques and now supply a kind of comic relief.

The gaudiness of the man-woman character, reinforced by Sternberg's observations, suggest a degradation of the original character whose gender-bending was an important part of the ritual. As Sharp notes, the Maid Marian character has a critical role and even takes over the collection of coin from observing villagers. The various names of the man-woman—Maid Marian, Bessie, Bet, and Molly—all occupy an everyday place in English storytelling and naming. Boy, as alienated as he may be in Land of Bad Weather and the Land of Fine Weather and even from his own body at times, thus participates in an established lineage of English cross-dressing. The critical difference, though, is that Boy does not seek to transgress but reconcile his gender identification with the clothes that obfuscate his boyhood to others.

Sharp presents a highly problematic difficulty with Boy's smock: only the undoing of the smock may once again render Boy's gender legible to the inhabitants of the fantastic worlds



through which he travels, but, at the same time, the undoing may only be carried out by a female character. With this complication, Sharp inverts the gender power imbalance, leaving Boy in the position of subjugation. In this scene, Boy recognizes, however reluctantly, that only a girl with specialized knowledge of clothing specific to her gender may render his boyhood legible to others. This incident offers a counterpoint to the few analytical works that have studied Sharp's critiques of the naturalized assumptions that culture makes about an individual's proper gender. In her feminist analysis of the liberated heroines in Sharp's work, Laura Tosi writes: "In the fairy tales of Evelyn Sharp [...] the utopian impulse characteristic of many Victorian fairy tales can be perceived both in the representation of a gender ideal of independence and freedom in her female characters and in the creation of countries of the mind—generally versions of fairyland—as utopian settings for the display of an ideal relationship between the sexes."<sup>51</sup> Tosi's analysis may hold true for some of Sharp's tales, but fairyland remains neither consistently safe nor utopian for many of Sharp's characters. Boy finds not utopia, but a literalized version of the separate gendered spheres of influence.

Boy's relationship with female characters, other than the Fine Weather Fairy, is at best troubled, at worst antagonistic. Talking about habits of dressing children in nineteenth-century England, social historian Deborah Gorham notes: "Up until the early twentieth century, virtually no distinction was made between male and female dress in infancy and early childhood. Boys and girls alike were dressed *as girls*; that is, in petticoats."<sup>52</sup> Women are the enforcers and

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<sup>51</sup> Laura Tosi, "Children's Literature in No-Land: Utopian Spaces and Gendered Utopias in Evelyn Sharp's Fairy Tales," in Christiane Bimberg and Thomas Kullmann, eds., *Children's Books and Child Readers: Constructions of Childhood in English Juvenile Fiction* (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2006), 40.

<sup>52</sup> Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 69.

regulators of the effeminizing dress for Boy. As he quickly realizes, only his nurse or a girl—the representatives of a domestic sphere from which he longs to escape—have the ability to divest him of the smock. Nor is Boy’s anxiety without historical precedent. The maternal figure that forces her son to cross-dress appears in Robert Stoller’s foundational work, dating from the 1960s, on transvestitism.<sup>53</sup> Creating further complications was that the popularity of dressing childhood as feminine was a coinciding move away from more extravagant dress for men in the early and even mid-nineteenth century in Britain. Prominent sexologists Bonnie Bullough and Vern Bullough, who pioneered modern research on alternative sexual practices, including cross-dressing, write about the shift in the period from a more elaborate male dress to clothing that created sharper delineations between masculine and feminine: “Some fashion historians have called this the ‘Great Masculine Renunciation,’ since the peacock male finery of earlier periods was rejected as both unmanly and undemocratic.”<sup>54</sup> Positioned in a moment in which dress, too, might represent the infamous “antithesis of cricket,” Boy recognizes the stakes in removing the smock that torments him.

Boy, however, finds himself literally and figuratively bound. The smock, which a woman has placed on him and secured in a way that remains out of his reach and other boys’ knowledge, demands female intervention. That a girl or woman can wield complete influence does not, the story implies, so much advance the cause of women as troublingly reverse the ways in which a girl might be bound. Where the corset might literally bind a woman’s figure even as it remolds the body in order to exaggerate as well as restrict the movement of the female form, the consequences for Boy remain deeply troubling as he attempts to prove his masculinity to each

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<sup>53</sup> Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross-Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 219.

<sup>54</sup> Bullough and Bullough, *Cross-Dressing, Sex, and Gender*, 175.

and every creature in fairyland. When Boy asks the boys of the Land of Bad Weather to undo the smock, they act flummoxed when confronted with the mechanics of the clasps. The boys find themselves stumped by the hooks and eyes that bind the smock and they blame Boy for their frustration:

“If you’re not a girl, you shouldn’t wear girls’ things, then,” they said. “There’s nobody here who knows how to undo a thing like that.

For a moment, a very short moment, Boy *almost* wished for a girl, who would be able to undo his smock for him; but he remembered himself in time, and held up his head, and looked all his tormentors in the face.

“I am a boy, all the same,” he said.

They looked at him, doubtfully.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike in his earlier smock-lifting with the beech-tree giant, Boy does not lift the skirts to display his knickerbockers here, though that would be the easiest solution. Instead, he tries to exercise agency over his gender identity through assertion alone. In this episode, the burden of proof shifts from the presentation of clothing to verbal declaration. Sharp builds a progression where she exposes the fallacy of the optical proof of gender and thus upends a very well known fairy tale convention in which dress frequently represents agency: an ugly disguise may liberate the wearer or an elegant one correlate with a character’s true identity. The relationship between dress and its associations with charisma and magic have been well-documented, particularly by Joseph Roach. In his inquiry into the “it” factor that is an intrinsic part of celebrity culture from the Restoration to present day, Roach devotes an entire chapter to studying the importance of

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<sup>55</sup> Evelyn Sharp, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” 80.

clothing. He writes: “Clothes can charm the body they adorn.”<sup>56</sup> The transformational power of clothes reappears throughout classic fairy tales: Cinderella’s dress and shoes that elevate her class; the celestial dresses and grotesque disguise of Donkeyskin, a princess hiding from her father, give her freedom of movement and assimilation in the kitchen; or even the lack of clothing in the case of one extraordinarily gullible emperor. Clothing, in fairy tales, often becomes an outward manifestation of internal character.

The smock for Boy, however, represents his entrapment in a form that does not match his sense of self. This was a topic that preoccupied several radical thinkers in Sharp’s circle, especially those, such as Carpenter, who were prominent in the Fellowship of the New Life. Stephanie Eggermont observes the way in which theatricality and gender are linked for the South African feminist Olive Schreiner in the essay, “The Policy in Favour of Protection” (1893). Eggermont’s analysis of Schreiner’s work, in this instance, also may be applied to Sharp’s: “The personification shifts the action from the girl’s body to her clothes, which are markers of Victorian femininity. The emphasis on dress as an expression of femininity suggests the inherent theatricality of gender roles.”<sup>57</sup> The representation of Boy’s body provides for him what is a false representation, one that precludes him from participating in the social sphere in which he desperately wants to take part.

Instead of gender serving as a mark of inclusion for those of one gender, Sharp exposes gendering as a form of socially imposed ostracism with attendant dangers. She deftly places Boy

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<sup>56</sup> Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 87.

<sup>57</sup> Stephanie Eggermont, “‘The method of life we all lead’: Olive Schreiner’s Short Fiction as Challenge to the Stage Method,” in Adrienne E. Gavin and Carolyn W. de la Oulton, eds., *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 45. Though Olive Schreiner did not belong to the Fabian Society, she was an early and active member of the Fellowship of the New Life from which the Fabians branched off. That Sharp and Schreiner would share ideological concerns in their writing is not surprising.

in the position he abhorred so that his own biases about boys and girls return to haunt him when he finds himself an outcast in the very place where he has sought refuge. Sharp was not alone during the fin de siècle in turning to the fairy tale to identify such ironies. As a member of Henry Harland's social circle and a contributor to the *Yellow Book* (1894-1897), Sharp encountered fairy tales thematically concerned with sociocultural isolation, such as those in Wilde's *House of Pomegranates* (1891) or in the tales of Hans Christian Andersen, whom Sharp revered, most notably the painful trespasses of the Little Mermaid.<sup>58</sup> In a sense, Andersen's Little Mermaid herself is cross-dressed, though in her story she crosses species rather than gender. In Sharp's writing, we can see the ways in which the social ostracism that emerges at the end of Wilde's "Fisherman and his Soul"—a thoughtful rewriting of Anderson's tale—connect with Carpenter's progressive ideas about gender inhabiting a spectrum, not a marked binary divide.

Carpenter's essay on the intermediate sex, as previously noted in this chapter, expounds upon the problems of modeling social expectations upon gender bifurcation. When Boy meets his gender en masse, he quickly discovers to his shock that even his own expectations of boyhood diverge quite sharply from the reality with which the Land of Bad Weather presents him:

"Are you *boys*?" exclaimed Boy, in bewilderment. There were boys everywhere, as far as he could see; short boys, tall boys, ugly boys, pretty boys, fat boys, thin boys, every kind of boy imaginable—except quiet boys. For they were all as noisy

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<sup>58</sup> Evelyn Sharp went so far as to travel to Denmark on a literary pilgrimage: "I gathered greedily all the information I could collect about Hans Andersen" (*Unfinished Adventure*, 105).

as they could be; instead of talking, they shouted; instead of smiling, they roared with laughter; and instead of either they knocked one another down.<sup>59</sup>

In the Land of Bad Weather, Boy finds that he is an interloper in the realm of boyhood, which builds on the same models of extreme gender performance that Carpenter explores. From a Fabian socialist position, the Land of Bad Weather works against collectivist politics. Unable to find other boys like him, Boy cannot operate as an individual outside these constructs. Boy can travel freely but remains unable to act until the smock is removed, which will at last enable him to circulate as he desires. Yet his unintentional cross-dressing serves another, arguably more pressing critical function: the smock that presents Boy as a girl ensures that he experiences girlhood as the target of boy's violence: "'Here's a girl, a girl, a girl!' they all shrieked, and at once began dancing wildly round him. 'Turn her out; use her up as a thunderbolt; send her down that rainbow; put her in the machine, and make her into lightning!'"<sup>60</sup> Boy spends the early part of the story attempting to escape the scope of female influence to pursue male independence, with clear overtones of the boy adventure story. Then he finds his safety endangered. Mechanization, typically a sign of industrial advancement, becomes the conduit for male assault upon his (presumed) female body. The other boys construe the titular Boy as an interloper and make preparations to expel him as ammunition.

In spite of the antagonism of the boys in the Land of Bad Weather toward the boy they believe to be a girl, the disturbing moment allows Boy to recognize and to begin to reform his attitude toward girls. Boy escapes in a moment of distraction, which is when Sharp introduces

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<sup>59</sup> Sharp, "The Boy Who Looked like a Girl," 78.

<sup>60</sup> Sharp, "The Boy Who Looked like a Girl," 79.

the Fine Weather Fairy and provides a model for boy-and-girl collusion. Stumbling upon the fairy, Boy for the first time regrets having to announce that he is not, in fact, a girl:

“I am a boy,” he said, as gently as he could; “but I will take care of you, and we will go away from all those other boys. I don’t think they are the right kind of boys at all. And will you please unfasten my top thing?”

He turned his back to her very solemnly; and the little Fine Weather Fairy understood perfectly, and unhooked it for him at once; and the blue linen smock fell down on the ground at last, and he stood before her, a real boy in sailor clothes.

“Now, we will go away,” he said, taking her hand; “and I will kill all the boys who try to tease you.”

Killing seemed quite easy, now he had got rid of his linen smock.<sup>61</sup>

Boy for the first time does not have a conception of universal boyhood as a monolithic entity. Simply acknowledging that there is a “right kind” of boy shifts the conversation from one of boy- versus-girl to boyhood as a dynamic and transforming phenomenon. Through this transition, Boy begins to understand that he may define himself as something other than what he initially expected. Regression supplants progression, however, when Boy feels that the shedding of the smock represents the aforementioned transformation—he now becomes a “real boy.” The phrasing evokes Carlo Collodi’s “Adventures of Pinocchio” (1883), in which Pinocchio also finds himself rescued and made a real boy (though he begins as a marionette) by a fairy with turquoise hair. The possible allusion to the immensely popular Italian tale suggests an enlarging dialogue with Continental Europe about the nature of boyhood itself, one continued in J. M.

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<sup>61</sup> Sharp, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” 83.

Barrie's play *Peter Pan* (1904). All of these stories represent something tangible and troubled about the experience of becoming a boy during the 1890s and early 1900s. Sharp's Boy, once he feels he has transformed with his de-smocking, immediately inhabits a masculinity defined by violence: the very model of boyhood he previously dismissed as not the "right kind." Boy channels his violence via a specific brand of chivalry in defense of the Fairy of Fine Weather, but the connection with killing mediates anxieties about the ways in which Boy himself defines boyhood in the extreme terms that have excluded him. Through this scene, however, Boy first bonds with and then takes on the role of protector of the Fairy of Fine Weather. Their companionship resonates once they make their mutual escape and journey to her land.

Sharp wrote openly and frequently about the need for women and men to work in conjunction to achieve universal suffrage. Her goals remained as steadfastly socialist as they did suffragist. As John observes: "[Sharp] urged co-operation and collaboration between men and women wherever possible. In a talk to the Fabian Society's Women's Group she suggested that greater comradeship between the sexes might prove to be the most important change resulting from women's emancipation."<sup>62</sup> Whereas boyhood may appear under threat in Sharp's story, Boy never acts violently and instead finds the friend he has sought not among the boys in the Land of Bad Weather, but in a fellow traveler absconding from traditional gender roles.

To clarify, this is not to say that Boy is necessarily a homosexual character with clearly expressed erotic preferences. Instead, as a character that has yet to establish his adult sexuality, he assuredly operates as a genderqueer figure, though not a sexualized one. At the same time, his presence in Sharp's story points to a larger disturbance that had begun to trouble late Victorian readers of fables and fairy tales. Already during the time that "The Boy Who Looked like a Girl"

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<sup>62</sup> John, *Rebel Woman*, 146.



came into print, fears had reached fever pitch in response to representations of homosexuality and queerness in fairy stories, particularly Richard Burton's edition of *A Thousand and One Nights' Entertainment*, which had tremendous influence on late Victorian fairy tales. Yet, as several critics have noted, the link between the Victorian fairy story and homosexual culture of the period remains underexplored. Sumpter remarks: "While there has been recent interest in resituating Burton's edition in the context of the periodical debate that followed in its wake, its shaping influence on Orientalist discourse, and its role in Victorian theorizations of obscenity, the evidence for the appropriation of fairy tales by a subculture of homosexual readers has not been widely explored."<sup>63</sup> Sumpter proceeds to an analysis of the many ways in which fairy tales—particularly those featuring Orientalized fantastic imagery—served as code for homosexual acts and relationships. Numerous of Burton's contemporaries found space for queer identity in the fairy story and many of them were, or closely associated with, members of the Fabian Society. Just as writers Oscar Wilde and Laurence Housman found the fairy tale an ideal medium for exploring homosexual desires, Sharp, in parallel, understood the promise of this genre for negotiating questions about gendered identity during the fin de siècle. Her work, however, eschews the metaphorical coding that homophile writers had to employ in order to hint at attraction between persons of the same sex. Instead, she exploits the figures that populate fairy tales to confront questions about normative social expectations about gender directly. Sharp directs her interest to the abandonment of coded discourse and rejects ciphers in favor of transparent engagement with and dissection of gender as performed and complex rather than innate and monochromatic. Girl, boy, woman, man—the words themselves undergo a heavily scrutinized examination, in "The Boy Who Looked Like a Girl."

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<sup>63</sup> Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*, 157.

Viewed in its entirety, Boy's journey becomes not just about shedding preconceived notions of gender, but also about Boy coming to recognize female characters as allies along his journey. Prior to arriving in the Land of Bad Weather, Boy finds the Pimpernel Fairy and requests her assistance in his quest:

“Please,” said Boy, in a great hurry, “I want to go to the Land of Bad Weather, because there aren't any girls there; and I am tired of girls, and babies, and all that; and the grumpy old giant, who lives in the beech tree, said that you knew the way. And, please, will you tell me as quickly as you can?”

“Oh, it is quite simple,” said the Pimpernel Fairy, in a voice as soft as summer rain, and as clear as star-shine; “you have only to climb into Cloudland, and there you are. But I am afraid they won't let you in, because you are a girl.”

“I'm *not* a girl,” exclaimed Boy. “It's all because of this horrid top thing.”<sup>64</sup>

Boy seeks intervention and guidance from a woman even as he asks her to help escape the nursery. Strangely, in this lineage of tales from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, boys regularly enact boyhood through the assistance and perhaps even exploitation of female fairies. The fairies' willingness may seem a performance of subjugation, but in “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” the girls and women occupy positions of influence that Boy comes to respect through his travels. The Pimpernel Fairy—like the giant—misreads Boy's gender but, in this moment, she provides solidarity, trying to make the child in front of her understand that to be a girl is to be excluded from the masculine social sphere. Even a traveling seagull, from whom Boy obtains a ride, turns Boy's prejudices back on him: “What are *you* doing up here, I should like to know? Little girls ought to be playing with dolls in the nursery, not sitting on top

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<sup>64</sup> Sharp, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” 75.

of poplar trees.”<sup>65</sup> Male characters in fairyland act aggressively to impose their interpretations of Boy’s gender—ergo the limits and restrictions expected of a girl—whereas the female characters largely do not seek to exclude Boy but make him aware of the prejudices that await a girl in the enchanted world they inhabit. Boy has brought his biases against the nursery with him into fairyland and then must withstand the ways in which they limit his opportunities to socialize and circulate. Even the East Wind, personified as a curmudgeon, rejects a girl’s right to passage: “The East Wind grumbled, and said he must be a girl because he looked like one, and he ought not to be there at all.”<sup>66</sup>

Where Tosi suggests that Sharp builds feminist utopias, I instead contend that Sharp builds socialist spaces that lie outside the realm of the separate spheres that Victorian culture allotted to men and to women. In these spaces, boys and girls eventually interact in ways that advance both their interests and goals. The sororal space of Land of Fine Weather decidedly is not a utopia, but another exclusionary world. When Boy does at last arrive at the Land of Fine Weather escorted by the Fine Weather Fairy, he discovers that he is as unwelcome there as in the Land of Bad Weather. When the Fine Weather Fairy presents Boy to the Sun Queen, the latter immediately sees through the guise of the smock and declares, “That girl is a boy.”<sup>67</sup> Certainly, the Sun Queen has greater powers of penetration, since she understands the smock as a superficial trapping that does not determine gender. The Fine Weather Fairy then attempts to counter with a strange twist to the argument, that Boy has the right to stay because he can carry off the appearance of a girl, even as he has spent the story resolutely announcing his boyhood to

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<sup>65</sup> Sharp, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” 76.

<sup>66</sup> Sharp, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” 78.

<sup>67</sup> Sharp, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” 86.

giant and seagull alike: “Please, your Majesty, he *looks* just like a girl,” said the little fairy, growing tearful.”<sup>68</sup> Desperate to stay with the one friend he has made, even Boy embraces some slippage in his gender:

“I’m quite sure I look like a girl,” he said, eagerly.

“Are you a girl?” said the voice of the Sun Queen.

“It is really too bad,” exclaimed Boy, beginning to grow impatient. “They all said I looked like a girl, when I wanted them to think I was a boy. I don’t know what I am expected to say next.”

“Well, you know,” said the Sun Queen, “you must be one or the other. I suppose you can’t help it, if you are a boy; but I am exceedingly sorry for you, if you are; and you certainly can’t stop here. We don’t allow boys.”<sup>69</sup>

Even as Boy wears clothes that should allow him to move between gendered realms, the transformation provided by the smock’s assumption or discarding only has the power to isolate. The Land of Fine Weather therefore functions as a hyper-feminized region, but its exaggerated femininity noticeably does not elevate the kingdom. Finally, the crisis of gender told lightheartedly in the story descends into pure farce when the Fairy of Fine Weather speaks on Boy’s behalf: “I tumbled into the Land of Bad Weather, and he helped me, I mean *she* helped me to get away; and so I asked him, I mean *her*, to stop a little. He, I mean *she*, was very brave your Majesty; and I should like to reward him, I mean *her*, please your Majesty.”<sup>70</sup> The Sun Queen argues that Boy must be either a boy or a girl, yet the fairy’s advocacy suggests a more

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<sup>68</sup> Sharp, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” 86.

<sup>69</sup> Sharp, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” 86-87.

<sup>70</sup> Sharp, “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” 86.

complicated relationship. Boy may identify as a boy, but the categories have become destabilized over the course of the tale even to the characters themselves. In the end, Boy experiences complete rejection and even expulsion for failure to be, as the Queen describes it, “one or the other.” Ultimately, however, Sharp’s short fiction firmly rejects the strictures attached to the gender binary.

### **Boy, and the Other Boy**

In the early twentieth century, Sharp relocated her interrogation of gender roles from fairyland to the middle-class Edwardian home in order to show how, even in progressive households and among modern characters, cultural expectations work against children who adhere to either an empirical, militaristic boyhood or retiring, romanticized girlhood. In her realist novel *The Other Boy*, Sharp depicts the inner workings of a modest family living in a countryside home. The four siblings comprise one brother and three sisters. Charley, whose full name is Charlotte, spends most of the book with Ted, the masculine brother who chafes against the sensitive household with their father: a non-traditional patriarch who works as an artist. Ted longs to join the army and break free from the household, whereas Charley specifically articulates that she identifies as a boy.<sup>71</sup> Even more strikingly, Ted both acknowledges and affirms Charley’s gender identification: “Charley, as he always called her, to show that he appreciated her wish to be considered a boy, had just been chattering gaily about caterpillars, and

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<sup>71</sup> For the sake of consistency with the novel, in which Charley identifies as a boy but the narrator refers to the character with female pronouns, which presents obvious complications for the reading of a potentially transgendered character, I will refer to Charley using female pronouns.

her abrupt question was a little startling.”<sup>72</sup> Charley’s demand that her family recognize her masculine gender resonates with modern research that has sought to understand how children frequently develop their identities from within. In his work on early childhood, psychologist Jack A. Meacham divides childhood identity into four categories: essentialism, organicism, mechanism, and contextualism.<sup>73</sup> Charley’s identification may be considered essentialist—she views herself as innately “boy” and struggles with outward organicistic attempts to construct her gender identity for her. The narrator alternates between calling the character Charley and Charlotte, given that the attitudes around Charley shift, though Charley herself remains steadfast in her assertion that she is a boy. When the children learn that a new boy will come to study with them, however, Charley finds herself supplanted and faces the brutal recognition that she is no longer readable as a boy to Ted once the prospect of a biologically male boy arises. Suddenly, Ted dismisses Charley and her name slips back to Charlotte:

“You—you used to say I was as good as—as another boy,” she stammered with a quivering mouth.

“Oh, well,” said Ted awkwardly, “I didn’t mean that exactly. I only meant that you were all right—for a *girl*. The other boy will be quite different, don’t you see.”

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<sup>72</sup> Evelyn Sharp, *The Other Boy* (London: Macmillan, 1902), 1.

<sup>73</sup> Jack A. Meacham, “Action, Voice, and Identity in Children’s Lives,” *Rethinking Childhood*, eds. Peter B. Pufall and Richard P. Unsworth (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 78.

Charlotte did not see. She gulped down a sob with a tremendous effort, and looked up at him appealingly. “I’m not a girl!” she cried. “You always said I wasn’t—look at my bruises!”<sup>74</sup>

With the arrival of the “other boy,” Charley immediately loses the support of her brother, who has been the single figure openly acknowledging Charley as a boy. Charley tries to reconstruct herself for Ted as legibly boy, using her bruised body as the text. Instead, Charley becomes Charlotte and thus her legitimacy as a boy hinges on Ted’s recognition. Here, too, we can detect a structure that anticipates recent interventions into transgender theory. Gayle Salamon, in her powerful analysis of the body’s gendered legibility, notes: “the same social forces which constitute a body as culturally legible or illegible also shape the very feelings of embodiment which would seem to be most personal, most individual, and most immune to regulatory injunction.”<sup>75</sup> Charley struggles, like Boy, as one alienated from her own body. As a character that we can read as transgendered, Charley knows that her boyhood depends critically and utterly on Ted’s approbation, which in turn rips her agency away. Salamon discusses this relationship as follows: “A body becomes so by virtue of its interaction with that which surrounds it, not because it is composed of a stuff that is radically foreign to its surroundings.”<sup>76</sup>

What remains of great significance about *The Other Boy* is that the story does not result in the negation of Charley’s identity as male but instead concludes with a serious challenge to polarizing sexual designations. In Sharp’s narrative, it is the arrival of two external figures that

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<sup>74</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 21.

<sup>75</sup> Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 127.

<sup>76</sup> Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 69.

provide a move away from gender binaries: first, the “other boy,” Tony Marshfield; and secondly, a New Woman, the bicycle-riding governess, Miss Nibbins, also called Nibs. By providing these alternative, intermediary models of gender, Tony and Miss Nibbins offer Charley and the other children the opportunity to see gender as a spectrum. This feature is characteristic of several Edwardian women’s fictions, as Jane Miller notes: “The rebellious women in Edwardian novels fight against the binary oppositions that reinforce gender polarization and limit women’s choices—oppositions between marriage and vocation, private and public, feminine and masculine.”<sup>77</sup> Tony and Miss Nibbins force the children to confront their own assumptions about a gender binary as they turn the household dynamics inside out.

I previously argued that Sharp’s vision is one of individualism leading to socialism. In *The Other Boy*, the family cannot reach a collective good until each character has the freedom to establish his or her identity separate from social expectations. The indomitable Miss Nibbins shows up—with her bicycle—and is bright and independent. When the tire of her bicycles blows, she overhears Ted and the girls upon their approach as Ted expresses his feeling of belittlement at having a female governess: “It’s much worse for me than it is for you girls, anyhow! Girls must expect to be taught by women all their lives—boys are different. It’s bad enough to be going to a stupid modern school where nobody else goes, instead of being sent to a real public school like any other chap; but that’s nothing to being coached by a *woman*.”<sup>78</sup> One of the story’s projects is the reformation of Ted to expand his limited understanding of gender roles. The bicycle offers symbolic reinforcement of the governess’ status as a New Woman:

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<sup>77</sup> Jane Eldridge Miller, *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel* (London: Virago Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>78</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 27.



athleticism, unregulated and rapid movement, and more liberal dress. A decided albeit passive misogynist at the beginning of the novel, Ted develops a begrudging respect for Miss Nibbins and he eventually even acknowledges Tony as a boy, though an atypical one based on Ted's rigid standards for his own sex. Sharp's narrator draws attention to the ways in which male children like Ted privilege masculinity. When discussing Miss Nibbins' interests, ones that include athletics and science, Ted declares she is as good as a boy.<sup>79</sup> To emasculate Tony, Ted compares the former unfavorably to his sister: "'Charley always was more like a boy than a girl,' said Ted, chuckling, 'so I naturally trained her to be one.'"<sup>80</sup> First, Charley finds her assertions of identity rejected by Ted, and then, when he does acknowledge her as a boy, he does it in a way that further diminishes her identity as separate from his judgment. Ted giveth, and Ted taketh away.

Sharp's novel finds in Ted a locus for the expression of patriarchal attitudes, ones that are not revolted against, but—in true Fabian fashion—reformed. *The Other Boy*, first serialized in *Little Folks* girls' magazine, presents Tony as markedly other. Tony appears not as the materialization of the other children's fevered imaginings, but as shy and effeminate:

In their excitement over the prospect of having another boy to play with, the children had jumped happily to the conclusion that he would be a big, strong, healthy fellow, as fond of sports and as manly as Ted himself; and it had never occurred to them for a moment that he might possibly be quite different from the picture they had drawn of him in their minds. When they saw the slight, delicate-looking boy who stood there, shading his eyes with his hands, and behaving for

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<sup>79</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 32.

<sup>80</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 33.

all the world like one of their father's despised painter friends, their disappointment was so great that they forgot their manners altogether, and stared at him blankly.<sup>81</sup>

Tony's effeminacy becomes the children's justification for pranks, insensitive comments, and aggression, especially on the part of the slighted Charley. In her biography, John reminds us the controversial sexual context that informs many of Sharp's fictions for young readers from this period: "Tony is best understood in the context of debates about sexuality and a pathologising of homosexuality in the wake of the Oscar Wilde trials [April-May 1895] which was challenged by progressive thinkers on sexuality. The latter included Evelyn's friend the gay writer and socialist Edward Carpenter, who explored the concept of an 'intermediate sex.'"<sup>82</sup> Neither hale nor hearty, Tony's delicacy comes as a disappointment to the children. Tony denies any interest in guns or hunting and soon proves himself unathletic, too. The narrator emphasizes Tony's limp handshake and quiet demeanor: "Tony, quite unconscious of the fact that they were almost as shy of him as he was of them, gave a limp hand in return to each of theirs, and blushed again."<sup>83</sup> Such representations aim not to belittle or mock Tony. They point instead to an alternative way of being a boy with manifold definitions of masculinity.

Tony's unusual and potentially stigmatized gender performance form part of the broader contestation of normative, as well as heteronormative, sexual identities, ones that characterized the progressive politics of the Fellowship of the New Life and the Fabian feminists. The Fabian Women's Group openly tackled the subject of women's place in society in a series of lectures in

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<sup>81</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 53.

<sup>82</sup> John, *Rebel Woman*, 27.

<sup>83</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 54.

1909: “This century we have arrived at a point where, instead of ignoring sex, we must affirm it, and claim emancipation on the ground of sex alone. To this end, we must abandon all useless comparisons of ourselves and our achievement with men and their achievement, and equally useless comparisons between different types of our own sex.”<sup>84</sup> The children of *The Other Boy* adopt these very comparisons with which the Fabian Women’s Group hoped to dispense. Sharp’s novel depicts the damaging ways in which Charley especially reproduces these criticisms when she talks about Tony: “‘If he was really a girl, he wouldn’t be so bad,’ observed Charlotte. ‘But as it is, you can’t call him anything!’ ‘He certainly isn’t a boy,’ grumbled Ted.”<sup>85</sup> From Tony’s behavior to his appearance, the children dissect him as a foreign species. Little sister Nancy remarks on Tony’s “silly soft hands!”<sup>86</sup> When Ted assaults Tony, Ted attempts to justify knocking him down: “he shouldn’t have just stood in that limp way like a rotten jelly-fish!”<sup>87</sup> Part of the criticism Sharp embeds in her novel is one of narrative. Ted understands the Edwardian narrative of boyhood to mean firmness of grip and purpose, aggressive behavior, and violence in place of speech.

The child characters of *The Other Boy* understand narratives about gender, class, and even age as prescriptive. When the children plot to rid themselves of Aunt Theodosia, Tony’s suggestion to pretend to be a ghost and appear to her in the middle of the night meets with a comment from the narrator: “Tony . . . whose inexperience in conspiracies forced him to fall

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<sup>84</sup> Millicent Murby, “Summary of Papers and Discussions,” in *Women’s Fabian Tracts*, ed. Sally Alexander (London: Routledge, 1988), 106.

<sup>85</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 67.

<sup>86</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 68.

<sup>87</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 93.

back upon the time-worn devices of the story-book.”<sup>88</sup> Tony falls upon the tropes of the Gothic whereas Ted embraces those of the adventure tale. As such, Ted also expects that Tony, not Ted, requires reformation in the mold of a more traditional masculinity: “At the time of their reconciliation, Ted, in his sanguine, thoughtless way, had quite expected that the elder boy would at once become a perfectly different person, as devoted to sports and games as any ignorant schoolboy could wish.”<sup>89</sup> Yet, Sharp’s narrative never remolds any of the characters so that they will fulfill Ted’s ideals. When Charlotte falls into the river current and Tony dives in after her, it does not become a moment of masculine rescue of weak femininity, since Tony himself cannot swim. Significantly, it is the indomitable Nibs, the New Woman, who comes to their rescue. Ted assists her, and he then follows her example when she administers first aid.<sup>90</sup> The triumphant conclusion to this heroic adventure story is carried out the bicycle-riding governess. In the end, the children become friends and are able to work collectively because they each have the opportunity to pursue their own individual interests. Tony will study art and painting, Ted will attend military school, and Charley will become the other boy of the title. Gender binaries fall away in the face of these diverse presentations of gender. Ultimately, *The Other Boy* provides an affirmative portrait of not only the New Woman, but also the transgendered identity of what we might call the New Child.

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<sup>88</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 149.

<sup>89</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 174.

<sup>90</sup> Sharp, *The Other Boy*, 193-95.

## The De-Queering of Dandytuft in “The Little Queen and the Gardener”

In “The Little Queen and the Gardener” (1900), Sharp utterly and bitterly upends the fairy tale in what is her least Fabian and most openly revolutionary confrontation with the genre. Deeply ironized, “The Little Queen and the Gardener” deliberately sets out to commit the faults Sharp heavily critiqued in her pamphlet, *Fairy Tales: As They Were, as They Are, and as They Should Be*, which she wrote and published eleven years earlier. Sharp’s essay, mentioned previously, argues that when contemporaries write fairy tales with specific didactic intent using modern language and allusions, it disrupts the timeless qualities and magic that traditionally defined the genre. “The Little Queen and the Gardener” deliberately uses all the tropes of the appropriated modern tale ultimately to satirize the shortcomings of these types of didactic intrusions. First, the story roots itself in a parody of decadence and faux Wildean wit. The tale opens with the King and Queen of a kingdom inviting a magician to the coming-of-age party for their son, Prince Dandytuft. They invite a magician for fashionable reasons: “‘It will make such a nice change,’ the Queen said. ‘People are getting tired of fairy godmothers. A magician is something *quite* new.’”<sup>91</sup> Certainly, the characters in Sharp’s stories could have wandered out of a Wildean society comedy, since they revel in epigrammatic wit. But, importantly, this story also mocks social pretensions and not, I argue, Wilde himself. The fairy tale continues to develop strangely. Upon arriving, the magician—who is utterly disenchanted with Dandytuft’s highly performative dandyism—puts the prince under a spell that makes him work as a gardener, an activity that aims to make him manlier. Dandyism, repeatedly denounced by Dandytuft’s fellow characters and repellent and grotesque, plays against the lunacy of highly stylized and superficial

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<sup>91</sup> Evelyn Sharp, “The Little Queen and the Gardener,” *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* 66 (July 1900): 938.

court opinion. Meanwhile, the little queen of the title rules a neighboring kingdom, upending social mores by befriendng the scullery maid and showing little interest in marriage. Ultimately, the tale concludes with a caustic, heavily orchestrated conclusion that undermines the fairy tale's conventional happy ending. In a sense, since it is hyperaware as both a satire and fairy tale, Sharp's short story embodies Miller's description of the Edwardian novel: "Edwardian novels about women and feminism exhibit a marked self-consciousness about their form. There are obvious manipulations of traditional plots and purposeful disappointments of readerly expectations; conventions and stereotypes are exposed and ironized; the discrepancies between traditional narratives and the actual lives of modern women are frequently commented upon, by characters as well as narrators."<sup>92</sup> The Queen has many suffragist impulses and rules without input or deferral to male advisors. That the conventional conclusion to the fairy tale genre would marry her off regardless comes under suspicion in the story. Sharp's narrator transparently exploits generic expectations, and such exploitation begins with the prince who at first appears as a romantic hero.

Sharp presents a romantic hero only to utterly subvert the trope with Dandytuft's glib air and effeminate appearance. The lexicon of masculinity in children's literature has been previously documented as generic and pervasive. In their work on the lexicography of children's literature, Murray Knowles and Kirsten Malmkjær discuss the way in which heroic qualities relate to the boy hero's physical characteristics: "The italicized items lexically signify the essence of 'maleness' in the genre: *active, well built, tall, strapping, broad shouldered, handsome, brave*. These all serve to represent to the reader the physical description of the ideal

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<sup>92</sup> Miller, *Rebel Women*, 5.

hero.”<sup>93</sup> Dandytuft, however, has none of these attributes. Instead, the narrator emphasizes Dandytuft’s delicacy and exaggerated beauty: “The Prince stood a little way off, looking more than usually pleased with himself. His exquisite lace ruffles had never been more carefully arranged, his white and silver court suit fitted his charming figure to perfection, and his new diamond crown, poised lightly on his well-curved hair, set off his delicate pink complexion admirably.”<sup>94</sup> Dandytuft’s aloofness magnifies the self-conscious construction of his clothing and how his public persona alienates him from other members of court. He plays prince more than behaves as one. Clearly not a hero destined for a quest or space in the boy’s adventure novel, Dandytuft trespasses from the English stage, always populated with dandies from Shakespeare’s comedies through Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895).

Though the legacy of the dandy traverses the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Sharp riddles her story with allusions to problematic Victorian characters and poetry. In doing so, she grounds the fairy tale in her own time period in order to turn the critique to her contemporaries. When the magician references little queen Campanula’s rejection of Dandytuft as a suitor, he snarkily describes her reaction to the suit: “She remarked that you were a dressed-up doll, and asked me if I could not find her a man.”<sup>95</sup> The description of the lover as a “dressed-up doll” borrows from John Keats’s poem “Modern Love” (1817):

And what is love?—It is a doll dress’d up  
For idleness to cosset, nurse, and dandle;

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<sup>93</sup> Murray Knowles and Kirsten Malmkjær, *Language and Control in Children’s Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1996). 89.

<sup>94</sup> Sharp, “The Little Queen and the Gardener,” 939.

<sup>95</sup> Sharp, “The Little Queen and the Gardener,” 940.

A thing of soft misnomers, so divine  
That silly youth doth think to make itself  
Divine by loving, and so goes on  
Yawning and doating a whole summer long,  
Till Miss's comb is made a pearl tiara,  
And common Wellingtons turn Romeo boots;  
Then Cleopatra lives at Number Seven,  
And Anthony resides in Brunswick Square.  
Fools! if some passions high have warm'd the world,  
If queens and soldiers have play'd high for hearts,  
It is no reason why such agonies  
Should be more common than the growth of weeds.  
Fools! make me whole again that weighty pearl  
The Queen of Egypt melted, and I'll say  
That ye may love in spite of beaver hats.<sup>96</sup>

Keats' poem resonates throughout Sharp's story as it comments on the idleness of the court and mocks the romance of the fairy tale as highly artificial and empty of meaning. Dandytuft begins uprooting weeds and the magician's magical punishment—that Dandytuft must toil by working the land—inevitably evokes the Wilde trial of 1895 and Wilde's subsequent sentencing to the hard labor that broke his health. As seen in Sharp's own autobiographical memories of the trial, the trial evoked disgust in Sharp for its injustice toward Wilde and for the hysterical prudery of

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<sup>96</sup> John Keats, "Modern Love," in *John Keats: Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 220-21.



her fellow Victorians. Yet the allusions in the story appear at an almost frenetic pace and place the story in dialogue not only with Wilde, but also a series of Victorian texts. The magician that sentences Dandytuft to hard labor to masculinize him seems to be doing a very energetic impression of the White Rabbit of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). The narrator of "The Little Queen and the Gardener" describes the magician: "The magician pulled out his watch, and began talking rapidly in short, jerky sentences. 'Excuse me, I am not in time for anything of the sort,' he said. 'In fact, I am exactly ten minutes too soon.'"<sup>97</sup> Both the magician and the rabbit are untrustworthy guides with a sense of order that is dissonant with the protagonist's constructions of life and logic. To return to Wilde, Campanula, much like Wilde's Jack and Algernon in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, verbally outmaneuvers her courtiers. She holds socialist tea parties in which the scullery maid acts as a guest of honor and love becomes a shallow mockery. The attempted conversion of Dandytuft from pretty socialite to worker of the land also suggests a possible allusion to the juxtaposition of Colin and Dickon in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1910). In Burnett's novel, Colin is the wheelchair-using, pale aristocrat and Dickon the hale young worker. Only once Colin spends time working in the outdoors does he return to health, which coincides with the reform of his character from prig to compassionate boy. "The Little Queen and the Gardener" embroils its characters in intertextual dialogue, solidly grounding the tale in a hyperaware modernity constantly reflecting the texts that surround the story. These allusions are critical to understanding the story, for even amid the frippery of Campanula's and Dandytuft's respective courts the story mocks their supposed "reformations" into more conventional fairy tale archetypes.

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<sup>97</sup> Sharp, "The Little Queen and the Gardener," 939.

The manliness of Dandytuft becomes a counterpoint to his earlier lace cuffs when he reemerges near the tale's conclusions. Yet the reformation of Dandytuft utterly disintegrates:

He was tall and straight and strong, with a red-brown skin that the sun and the rain and the four winds had given him, and a look in his eyes that only comes to those who have lived long with the flowers and the bees and the singing-birds. At his feet a puny green plant was making a struggle to grow, and the gardener's face wore a whimsical expression as he bent over it.

“Just for the want of a few genuine, honest human tears!” he observed. “It is really most unfortunate that I am neither honest nor genuine, and that the noisy expression of grief bores me.”<sup>98</sup>

At first, the narrator suggests that Dandytuft's transformation into a more traditionally manly character has succeeded. He appears as hearty as a farmer and the description betrays none of the fanciful words originally used to describe his mannerisms and attire. In spite of the misleading initial description, however, Dandytuft has transformed only in the most superficial manner. Wildean to his core, hard labor has not remade Dandytuft's nature. Rather, the work has changed only his first appearance. His continuity of character may be read as a rebuttal to the notion that a non-normative man or non-normative woman can be forcibly remade. In another quote that evocatively brings to mind the Wilde trial and Wilde's final exile in Paris, Dandytuft explains his transformation from prince to exiled gardener to the bewildered scullery maid: “My striking originality and the stupidity of others drove me out of my country.”<sup>99</sup> Thoroughly destabilized, the fairy tale here operates in a queer realm in which the queen, prior to the

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<sup>98</sup> Sharp, “The Little Queen and the Gardener,” 943.

<sup>99</sup> Sharp, “The Little Queen and the Gardener,” 943.

orchestrated ending, prefers the female companionship of the scullery maid and Dandytuft remains as effeminate and dandyish as when the story opened. This approach seems to have had broader appeal among socialist writers. Sumpter remarks on a similar pattern in Laurence Housman's work: "Housman destabilizes expected constructions of masculine and feminine."<sup>100</sup> Moreover: "In the socialist press's preoccupation with fairy tale and folklore that wistfulness is often evident, revealing attempts to hold on to dreams of a future that can transcend political as well as biological unrest and disorder. For when ethical socialism looked back to 'the childhood of the world', it was also predicting the future—creating the longed-for happy-ever-after through a union of political science and 'impossible romance.'"<sup>101</sup> Both Housman and Sharp published widely in the same journals and magazine throughout their careers from the pages of the *Yellow Book* to *Atalanta* girls' magazine. What I hope to show here is that Sharp and Housman are part of a larger political project. These impossible romances haunt all the Fabian works discussed in this dissertation. In E. Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), as I show in the next chapter, the French teacher marries the heir of an estate. Disabled in the present, Nesbit's Dickie Harding (in *Harding's Luck* [1910]) discovers a healed body in a halcyon English past. In Webster's fiction, heroines marry up or down, but never within the confines of their own social class. The socialist fairy tale embraces these impossible romances and reworks genres to enable social reformation on the printed page. Already, as Sumpter observes, even the iconography of the fairy was undergoing a radical shift through Housman's illustrations:

The fact that Housman's male icon of love is a fairy also has specific significance in relation to popular and scientific explorations of homosexuality and cross-

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<sup>100</sup> Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*, 166.

<sup>101</sup> Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*, 130.

dressing. Housman, who in the early twentieth century was chairman of the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology (BSSP), had been interested in medical and psychological investigations of homosexuality from a much earlier date, as his correspondence with Havelock Ellis testifies.<sup>102</sup>

The fairy's new associations with homophile groups and its iconography also separate the fairy from clinical analysis. As Victorian social scientists more forcefully attempted to diagnose and medicalize homosexuality, the fairy tale genre provided a fantastic space divorced from these proceedings. Similarly, Sharp's tales refuse to pathologize or condescend to the queer male. "The Little Queen and the Gardener" rather through its allusions and failed reeducation of Dandytuft implicitly rejects the constructions around time, gender, and class. Yet, I do not suggest this work does not have its attendant problems. When Dandytuft and Campanula marry, the scullery maid who has served as Campanula's constant companion disappears back into the kitchen where she washes dishes "to the end of her days."<sup>103</sup> When separate spheres dissolve, those most protected by such segregation and the potential freedom separate spheres sometimes permit become lost. Tosi focuses on the stories featuring empowered, female protagonists: "In the fairy tales of Evelyn Sharp [...] the utopian impulse characteristic of many Victorian fairy tales can be perceived both in the representation of a gender ideal of independence and freedom in her female characters and in the creation of countries of the mind—generally versions of fairyland—as utopian settings for the display of an ideal relationship between the sexes."<sup>104</sup> Yet in "The Little Queen and the Gardener," the happy ending hardly provides an ideal relationship.

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<sup>102</sup> Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*, 166.

<sup>103</sup> Sharp, "The Little Queen and the Gardener," 947.

<sup>104</sup> Tosi, "Gendered Utopias," 40.

The courtship of Dandytuft and Campanula—in sharp contrast with Sharp’s other fairy tales—holds no romance except for the heartbroken scullery maid. Campanula and Dandytuft appear as ridiculous in conclusion as they did at the story’s opening.

Dandytuft, like Tony in *The Other Boy*, cannot be magicked out his effeminacy, just as Boy cannot be magicked into a new gender. They have natural places in enchanted lands. Boys surrounded by fairies or acting like them links them also to British queer culture during the nineteenth century. The word fairy appears as a euphemism for a member of the queer community as early as 1895 in the *American Journal of Psychology*, which describes men cross-dressing in women’s clothing.<sup>105</sup> Interestingly, as English writers embraced fairyland as a reclamation of English traditions and, occasionally, a display of nationalism, fairyland simultaneously became a place of Othering those within these English traditions. Just as the Maid Marian figure of the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance had in some instances been denigrated and turned into a figure of comic ridicule, the fairy may have equally been the anti-imperialist male, the otherworldly alien. Diane Purkiss, in her book on children in early modern England, notes: “The otherness of fairies licensed the fairytale as an expression of the otherness of homosexual desire.”<sup>106</sup> I would extend Purkiss’ definition to include pre-sexual otherness as expressed through gender. Sharp’s characters, though, find ways to maintain their identities even as magical and non-magical social forces around them seek to remake them. The socialist promise of Sharp’s work posits individuality as innate and desirable, legitimizing the characters’ rights to even—perhaps—operate outside generic and narratorial intent. Whether lace-cuffed,

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<sup>105</sup> Caroline Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*, 166.

<sup>106</sup> Diane Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden: A Dark History of Fairies, Hobgoblins, and other Troublesome Things* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 249.

besmocked, or bicycle riding, all of Sharp's heroes, to their credit, are the antithesis of cricket.

In exploring the link between individual experience and popular culture as expressed through the fairy tale, Maria Tatar observes the problem of the writer fighting against cultural restraints:

“Our cultural stories are the products of unceasing negotiations between the creative consciousness of individuals and the collective sociocultural constructs available to them.”<sup>107</sup> In the next section, I look at the ways in which Sharp's approach of Fabian reformation infiltrates many of her other works, touching on topics as diverse as the role of politics in art, English blood sport, and urban housing reform. Looking more broadly at her political engagement through storytelling, I assert that these works not only argue that reform is both necessary and possible, but that political expediency must be tempered, Sharp suggests, by compassion and the humanization of the Other, be it woman, man, animal, or magician.

### **Ugliness as Art in the Age of Aesthetics and Socialism**

1897 marked a significant year in the British monarchy as the empire coordinated a series of international celebrations commemorating Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The Fabians watched the coordinated spectacle with a skeptical eye. In their detailed account of the Society's history, the MacKenzies create a picture of the antagonistic but complex reaction of the Society members to the high-pitched nationalism, grounded in imperialist dogma:

Back in London at the end of June, Beatrice [Webb] found everyone “drunk with sight-seeing and hysterical loyalty.” The Jubilee celebrations provided a colourful outlet for the mood of self-righteous imperialism which was sweeping the

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<sup>107</sup> Maria Tatar, *Off with Their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 230.

country. Bonfires blazed from the hilltops; at Spithead the Home Fleet assembled for a demonstration of the naval power which held one seventh of the world in Britain's empire. Shaw airily told Ellen Terry, "The Jubilee business makes me sick—ugh!" But he found that his first responsibility after joining the St. Pancras vestry was to sit on a committee to supervise a celebration dinner for the poor—"a ghastly wicked wasteful folly." Beatrice was one of the hundred distinguished women who gave a banquet for a hundred distinguished men. But generally the Fabians tried to treat the whole thing in low key. They decided not to sing the national anthem at their annual dinner, but they did subscribe one guinea towards the cost of the decorations in the Strand. *Fabian News* justified this contribution on the grounds that Jubilee was "a national festival *from which we, as Socialists, should not disassociate ourselves.*" This was too much for Henry Salt, who wrote an indignant protest to Pease on 4 June. "The Jubilee is only 'national,'" he complained, "in the same sense as landlordism or Jingoism or gambling or drink or any other demoralizing practice is 'national.'"<sup>108</sup>

As the MacKenzies capture quite succinctly, Fabian disgust with extreme nationalism coincided with their participation and, one might even argue, collusion, with the performance of imperial entitlement. Sidney Webb made a distinctive intervention in a paper timed to match jubilee festivities. In his essay, "Labor in the Longest Reign (1837-1897)," he reflects on the progress and, at moments, the lack of progress, in socialist momentum and the condition of the working classes. He points out that though wages have increased since 1837 (cited as a wage nadir for mill workers and miners), they have not kept pace with the cost of living and that housing,

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<sup>108</sup> Norman MacKenzie and Jeanne MacKenzie, *The Fabians* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 247.

although more sanitary, still suffered from overcrowding. Still, by Webb's account, despite the fact that work hours were better regulated, the addition of overtime work undermined earlier progress. Webb's frustration plays against the enthusiastic nationalism expressed by English contemporaries during the approach of jubilee celebrations. Webb was typical of socialist suspicion of the jubilee as a patriotic display that drew attention away from crucial social problems. The Fabians focused more aggressively to address these gaps and, at this moment, many directed that focus toward elementary school education. Concurrent with the jubilee, the Fabian-friendly Bolton Labour Church, a branch of the Christian Socialist movement, announced its plans to form a school to enhance its efforts to introduce children to socialism at a young age.<sup>109</sup> As the empire focused on its long-reigning monarch, socialism, as seen in Fabian tracts such as "Socialism True and False" (1894) and "The Difficulties of Individualism" (1896), accelerated its efforts for widespread political education and dissemination of its ideas in mainstream print media. Literary historian Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, who has done extensive work documenting the emergence of small radical presses during the late Victorian period, observes: "During Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 and her Diamond Jubilee in 1897, antijubilee sentiment ran high in the radical press, and parodying Tennyson's jubilee poem [Carmen saeculare] was a source of widespread amusement [...] Henry Salt's 'Workmen's Jubilee Ode' from the 16 April 1887 issue of *Justice* imagines a radical response to the celebrations."<sup>110</sup> It is in the context of these antijubilee writings that Evelyn Sharp published her short story "The Little Princess and the Poet" in *Atalanta*, later reprinted as part of a fairy tale

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<sup>109</sup> Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*, 113.

<sup>110</sup> Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 191.



collection *All the Way to Fairyland* (1898).<sup>111</sup> During a charged political moment when the Fabian Society had a concentrated, critical focus on the British monarchy, Sharp wrote a fairy story that devalues a monarchical system in spite of the genre's investment in royal hierarchies that promise of social elevation through marriage.

Sharp, like her Fabian counterparts, never articulated a single coherent theory about the role of the arts in Fabian socialism or, for that matter, the place that Fabian socialism had in the arts. Instead, the author approaches genre as a Fabian, chipping away at its tropes and structure. In a similar way to “The Boy Who Looked like a Girl,” “The Little Princess and the Poet” subverts the fairy tale genre by using conventional phrasing to introduce a metafictional moment: “There was once a Poet whom nobody wanted.”<sup>112</sup> The Poet immediately becomes a figure of rejection and isolation, as do the arts, too, by logical extension. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, Fabians did not have a single, cohesive policy related to the arts in spite of multiple conversations on the subject during the first two decades of the Society's existence. Yet here, the opening conflict is a poet with political drive whose work does not resonate with its intended audience:

There once was a Poet whom nobody wanted. Wherever he went, he was always in the way; and the reason for this was his inability to do anything useful. All the people in all the countries through which he passed seemed to be occupied in making something,—either war, or noise, or money, or confusion; but the Poet could make nothing except love, and that, of course, was of no use at all. Even the

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<sup>111</sup> *Atalanta* (1887-1898) was a decade-long running periodical aimed at a readership of girls and young women. The editor, L. T. Meade, had a significant participation in feminist literary movements and was a member of the progressive women's group the Pioneer Club.

<sup>112</sup> Sharp, “The Little Princess and the Poet,” 91.

women, who might otherwise have welcomed him, could not endure the ugliness of his features; and, indeed, it would have been difficult to find a face with less beauty in it, for he looked as if all the cares and the annoyances of the world had been imprinted on his countenance and left it seared with lines. So the poor, ugly Poet went from place to place, singing poems to which nobody listened, and offering sympathy to people who could not even understand his language.<sup>113</sup>

As I discuss in more detail in relation to Nesbit's *Harding's Luck*, utilitarianism already had begun to take powerful hold of the Fabians and much of the dialogue surrounding workers' rights in the Fabian newsletters and tracts revolved around the question of prioritizing work for the fit, as defined through more conservative views of the body and gender. Yet the anti-utilitarian thrust of this passage deserves attention because it stands apart from a broader development within Fabian thought. In Sharp's tale, she aggressively pits the ideologies of utilitarianism against the arts, not to undermine the value of the arts, but to underscore the threat to artists. She points out the vulnerability of artists if there is a social expectation that their creative work must translate to monetary benefits for the workers or that they must visibly impact economics and the labor force. Sharp's narrative suggests that the need to make the language of industry, the need to "make" (rather than "create," which has decidedly artistic connotations) a product valuable in a capitalist culture, pushes the artist to the fringes of society. In her story, the Poet exists neither as an effective agent of capitalism nor as the figure of Bohemian romance. The suffering poet has become unromantic, unlike popular paintings such as Henry Wallis' *Chatterton* (1856) or Carl Spitzweg's *The Poor Poet* (1839). His physical ugliness operates almost as a deformity, signaling his body as a projection of the political corruption to

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<sup>113</sup> Sharp, "The Little Princess and the Poet," 91.

which he acts as an ignored and unwanted witness. Of utmost importance, too, is that the Poet does not occupy a place as the secluded figure in a garret suffering in silence. Sharp's Poet is in the world, of the world, for the world. He moves among the people in spite of his isolation from them and their suffering as they struggle with poverty and brutal manual labor. The story also inevitably evokes the dilemma of what remains one of Andersen's most influential tales, "The Ugly Duckling" (1843). Sharp's sympathetic fascination with Andersen as an unattractive storyteller even arises in her autobiography: "I gathered greedily all the information I could collect about Hans Andersen. Some people, I was told, marveled at his ugliness when they first saw his statue in the park at Copenhagen. Yet I felt that the rugged, lined face, with its look of unsatisfied inquiry, its vague hesitancy, helped one understand how his greatest story came to be written."<sup>114</sup> One feature that appears repeatedly in "The Little Princess and the Poet" is the series of lines on the poet's face.

Through this metaphor of ugliness, Sharp unifies the arts with the artist's body rather than the artist's textual bodies. The Poet's face repeatedly incites disgust and hostility. Yet because the narrator establishes a link between the Poet's act of witnessing political oppression and his ugly features, both the people's and the court's hostility toward his repugnant visage operate as a lens through which they view the suffering of the poor, inciting their horror, discomfort, and disgust. The Poet becomes the canvas for poverty and in this way forces the court to see the suffering that the queen, king, and courtiers try to ignore. The story also suggests a working knowledge that the fairy tale has stakes far beyond its borders. Unlike the Grimm brothers, whose rigid imposition of order on unruly tales tamped them with didacticism, Sharp's emphasis on poverty shows that she understands the fairy tale as a genre invested in

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<sup>114</sup> Sharp, *Unfinished Adventure*, 105.

destabilization of gender and class. The conventional fairy tale, Sharp recognizes, can be a didactic vehicle, but in her own work, she specifically designs tales that enhance rather than enforce social mobility, contrary to the efforts of the Grimms and, much later, Andrew Lang. “The Little Princess and the Poet” clearly has a critical function that takes disability and class inequality into account. Rather than limiting or modeling specific moral lessons, “The Little Princess and the Poet” focuses its political ambitions on two of the most marginalized figures in its world: an unwanted poet and a disabled princess, blind from birth, who sits isolated in a court that treats her not as a figure of authority but as a child, even as she repeatedly asserts her opinions and political awareness amid her parents’ attempts to thwart her agency. The Poet lives in his world as a marginalized figure because the only acknowledged poets are the courtier-poets, whose poetry prettily reinforces the elitist values of the court. In reality, the problem of monarchical favoritism when patronizing poetry had enormous political relevance during the publication of *All the Way to Fairyland*.

At the time of the jubilee, the poet as a subject of anxiety and controversy was certainly topical. Since the death of Tennyson in 1892, the successor of his title as poet laureate had met with vigorous public debate. The controversy over the selection of the new poet laureate was one with which Sharp must have been aware not only as a writer, but also as a friend of traditionalist poet William Watson (1858-1935), whom many believed to be a serious contender for the post. Sharp knew Watson through his association with The Bodley Head. In her autobiography, Sharp mentions her publisher John Lane’s failed attempt to make a match between Sharp and Watson on an excursion of Bodley Head writers.<sup>115</sup> When the post of laureate came open, Watson positioned himself as a Tory option, eager to assume Tennyson’s laurels, but he never succeeded

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<sup>115</sup> Sharp, *Unfinished Adventure*, 23.

and soon faded into artistic obscurity. As John Lucas has noted, the most prominent poets of the age were highly tendentious figures:

Swinburne was hardly likely to find favor as a candidate for the vacant post. He was a known Republican, an atheist, and his early *Poems and Ballads* (1866), which had brought him to fame, had also by their sexual transgressiveness earned him lasting notoriety. What then of William Morris as a suitable candidate? By the time of Tennyson's death Morris had come to be seen as a poet of genuine stature. But he was also a proclaimed Marxist and active in support of exactly those forces that for Tennyson posed threats to "the State, the Church, the Throne."<sup>116</sup>

Ultimately, the underwhelming Alfred Austin assumed the post amid general disdain for his inferior poetry. From an artist's standpoint, the monarchy further degraded the arts through Austin's appointment. In Sharp's story, the queen rigidly wants to control artistic output sanctioned by the court and thus has five-and-forty incompetent poets that do not threaten the status quo. Certainly, allusions to Queen Victoria's appointment of Austin permeate this parody of the inept writer as political expedient. Yet in Sharp's fictional court, the Poet has the princess for his advocate. The Poet of "The Little Princess and the Poet" determines to write politically driven work even though it repeatedly leads to his expulsion from town and country, but this very quality attracts the princess for her understanding that the his work represents what she terms "real." In many ways, the Poet embodies the radical socialist politics of the late William Morris and, subsequently, the controversies associated with Morris' name. The Princess,

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<sup>116</sup> John Lucas, "Voices of Authority, Voices of Subversion," in Joseph Bristow, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 284.

through her advocacy, sanctions the Poet's work, signaling a potential for political reformation when she eventually inherits the throne.

To return to Austin's contentious appointment as poet laureate: unworthy poets overrun the court in Sharp's tale. The narrator critiques those individuals who practice poetry as a decorative hobby rather than a serious art with extraordinary derision. In "The Little Princess and the Poet," a hierarchy elevates genuine artists above pretenders. When the Princess declares that the prince-poets staying at the court may depart now that a "real" poet has arrived, the Queen must try to override her daughter and sets up a conflict over the aesthetics of poetry. Sharp imbues the Princess with authority over her mother and, by extension, the argument that poetry should have a specific social agenda and be driven by political need. Concurrently, the debate between princess and queen weakens the latter's monarchical authority, which is especially interesting given the story's appearance during the year of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. Though a king exists in the background making occasional grumbling comments, the real arguments over the stakes and value of poetry happen between two women. This is not to say that Sharp's story advocates the complete dissolution of the crown, but that the story critiques the throne's involvement as arbiters of art. Arguing that the monarchy mattered less to late Victorians than proletariat representation and the power of the aristocracy, historian D. M. Craig notes that by Queen Victoria's jubilee celebrations, "[t]he monarchy seemed relatively popular and politically neutral, and there was little to be gained in attacking it. Not everyone agreed that Britain was a 'crowned republic', and the secret influence of the monarchy did not vanish, but with the gradual eclipse of an older democratic republicanism there were fewer

voices who could muster the intellectual tools to oppose it.”<sup>117</sup> As noted, the Fabians constituted a predominantly middle-class body and certainly critiqued the crown, but most of them sought reformation through laws and had less of an investment in what the queen increasingly recognized as a role of shrinking political sway. Though the monarchy of Sharp’s story seems destined to replenish itself (as the Little Princess occupies her role as heir to the throne), the course of that monarchy, as the ending of the story implies, will shift dramatically as the Little Princess weds the proletariat poet.

Bodies, both poetic and human, operate as political space and, in the tradition of the fairy tale genre, metaphor. Disability studies scholar Emily Russell addresses this relationship in her critical work *Reading Embodied Citizenship*. She talks about uses of blindness and how often discussions of disability coincide with those of metaphor: “But I believe that it is difficult to talk for very long about disability without slipping into metaphor, not only because these figures are so pervasive, but also because I understand embodiment as inextricably wrapped up in both the material and the social. The body should not be reduced to symbol, but it is not entirely distinct from symbolism either.”<sup>118</sup> Sharp’s story ties in blindness as a disability in the case of the Princess and as a metaphor in the case of the court. Russell ties her argument to a persevering Elizabethan distinction of body natural and body politic, even though, as Russell demonstrates, the two are inextricably entwined. “The Little Princess and the Poet” immediately mixes metaphorical blindness and physical blindness with the Princess’ first appearance: “‘It is the little blind Princess,’ thought the Poet, and he bowed straight to the ground though he knew quite well

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<sup>117</sup> David M. Craig, “The Crowned Republic? Monarchy and Anti-Monarchy in Britain, 1760-1901,” *Historical Journal* 46, no. 1 (2003): 184.

<sup>118</sup> Emily Russell, *Reading Embodied Citizenship* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 64.

that she could not see him. The sentinels saluted, too, for they were so accustomed to saluting people who never saw them at all that the blindness of the little Princess made no difference to them.”<sup>119</sup> The Princess remains oblivious to these social cues. Sharp’s narrator empties class distinctions of meaning because for the Princess they cannot be seen, drawing attention to the performative nature of class. Part of this class battle becomes the Queen’s attempts to reinforce social barriers as her daughter dismantles them not from ignorance, but general disinterest. Moreover, the Queen’s feeble attempts to maintain a strict political hierarchy are heavily satirized. She has a passive spouse who nervously reinforces her every decree and she dominates her daughter’s potential suitors with flippant commentary. What could be viewed as an exercise in female power ends up deteriorating in the Queen’s attempts to reject meaning and political knowledge in her court. Monarchy loses meaning and power without acknowledgment though, as suggested in the incident with the sentinels, often these gestures constructed to reinforce the dominance of the courts are empty as even the courtiers fail to notice these gestures being practiced. The superficiality of the court’s power and its negation of its political responsibilities come to the forefront, which highlight their emptiness—essentially an aesthetics of nihilism.

Not only does “The Little Princess and the Poet” draw attention to the aesthetics of meaning; the entire collection *All the Way to Fairyland* also focuses repeatedly on characters’ demands to know, experience, or build “the real.” Part of this fascination for the Princess connects with her desire to understand the plight of the poor within her kingdom. In *All the Way to Fairyland*, the fairy tale genre works as a place of magical dissatisfaction. Sharp’s Princess longs to experience “real” poetry whereas the Poet experiences real poverty but does not manage to imbue his poetry with love until meeting the Princess. The male Poet’s desire to spread truth,

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<sup>119</sup> Sharp, “The Little Princess and the Poet,” 74.



moderated by the Princess' influence, inevitably evokes Tennyson's poem, "The Poet" (1830), which has a similar message. In his discussion of Tennyson's career, Joseph Bristow remarks: "'The Poet,' therefore, advances the view that the male poet's truth can indeed fortify the world. Though taking flight upon 'arrow-seeds,' his truth actually relies upon another source of power: a 'mother plant' that finally gives birth to a female icon of 'Freedom.' For some reason, 'The Poet' suggests that his truth must be mediated through forms of femininity because they more adequately represent his authority than he himself can."<sup>120</sup> Together, the Poet and the little Princess have the ability to manage social change. The Poet magically enables the Princess to see and as she loses her physical blindness, she nonetheless retains her insight, longing for beauty when beauty is the "real," with unmistakable shades of Keats's "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."<sup>121</sup>

Sharp politicizes the disabled body by setting up the central confrontation and conflict in the court itself—the political heartbeat of the kingdom. K. A. Miller, who has written critical evaluations of Fabian Nesbit, notes the significance of links between the body politic and the individual as a pervasive question in the literature of Sharp's contemporaries: "At the end of the nineteenth century—a period of anxieties occasioned by an increasingly difficult-to-manage Empire abroad and an equally hard-to-contain wave of immigrants flooding London's slums—the British public struggled to redefine nationhood and its relationship to the individual human body, while confronting controversies over class and gender, the problems of the poor, and the

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<sup>120</sup> Joseph Bristow, "Reforming Victorian Poetry: Poetics after 1832," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow, 11.

<sup>121</sup> John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in *John Keats: Complete Poems*, ed. Stillinger, 282.

nature and purpose of art.”<sup>122</sup> In “The Little Princess and the Poet,” nationhood and the individual become a mixed discussion as the Princess occupies space as both national body as monarch and a disabled, highly independent individual. The Princess has a developed sense of aesthetics that clash with her mother’s, so that art and whether art should be political or apolitical becomes a key battleground between the women. The Queen exerts her authority by undermining her daughter’s. Logically, this requires stripping one of the monarchs of authority even as the Queen depends on the collective belief in that authority and its reinforcement. Sharp writes:

The Queen, who was generally full of resources, felt that it was time to interfere.

“Do not listen to Her Royal Highness,” she said, soothingly, to five-and-forty poets. “She is so terribly truthful that she does not know what she is saying. I have tried in vain to break her of it.”<sup>123</sup>

Sharp takes a character that normally would exercise exceptional political power and simultaneously positions her as one of her country’s most marginalized citizens. When the Princess introduces the Poet to the court, her mother quickly negates the claim that the unattractive young man is a poet to the collected prince-poets eagerly hoping to secure the Princess’s favor. The young men, upon hearing the Queen, accept the latter’s placation: “The five-and-forty poets recovered their composure, when they heard that the Princess was rather to be pitied than blamed.”<sup>124</sup> In the contradictory power hierarchies, blindness strips the princess of

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<sup>122</sup> K. A. Miller, “‘Your loving is unlike any other’: Romance and the Disabled Body in the Gothic Fiction of Edith Nesbit and Lucas Malet,” in *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle*, eds. Adrienne E. Gavin and Carolyn W. de la Oulton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 194.

<sup>123</sup> Sharp, “The Little Princess and the Poet,” 71.

<sup>124</sup> Sharp, “The Little Princess and the Poet,” 73.

the privileges allotted her class. As an object of pity, she must receive the stare of others yet is unable to look back or confront the gaze that negates her sovereignty. The Queen participates in the stripping of her daughter's agency and monarchical authority. The princes' reaction to the little princess here is learned, not innate. The Princess repeatedly acts as an independent agent but the court conspires against her self-possession. She possesses an innate sense of truth unrelated to physical sight that makes the Poet her equal in his desire to bring to light, or sight, the plight of poor. Her faith in the Poet enables him to confront the court and their support of false poetry, or, in the world of the story, poetry without political urgency. He comments to the Queen who rejects him as a poet: "You will not like my poetry; I see five-and-forty gentlemen who can write the poetry that will give you pleasure; mine is written for the people, who have to work that you may be happy."<sup>125</sup> In the stakes of poetry, the story demands a reflection on a real divide between poetry as art and as ornament. The echoes of the contentious laureateship haunt the story, which ultimately cedes victory to the Poet and the Princess. The victory is decidedly Fabian with poetry reformed to reflect the hardships and needs of the people, but mediated by compassion for their suffering. Sharp establishes her what reveals itself to be a pattern in her iteration of Fabianism: that sincerity and empathy always must accompany social reform so that reform comes from a place of justice rather than charity, an idea that critiques a sustained hierarchical relationship between those giving and receiving that charity.

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<sup>125</sup> Sharp, "The Little Princess and the Poet," 77.

## The End of Blood Sport in “The Hundredth Princess”

Sharp clearly adheres to the philosophy that art must—at least in some capacity—model political reform. This drive finds its perfect genre in the fairy tale, especially during the fin de siècle, when the literary marketplace demanded new fairy tales all the time in the *Pall Mall Magazine*, *Lippincott’s*, the *Strand*, and the many children’s periodicals circulating during the period, particularly girls’ magazine *Atalanta*. In “The Hundredth Princess,” the story turns its political attention to blood sports, which had become highly controversial among socialists starting in the 1880s. Sharp, much like fellow Fabians Salt and Shaw, despised blood sports. Shaw was famous—infamous among his detractors—for his vegetarian diet. Carpenter also advocated a vegetarian diet in an article for *Seed-Time*, the journal attached to the Fellowship of the New Life. In his article, Carpenter argues that vegetarianism is the ideal diet as human nature fights animal nature when eating flesh, which is a “bestial intermingling,” whereas the passivity of the vegetable allows human nature to dominate it.<sup>126</sup> Although framed by concern for the human consumer rather than animal rights, Carpenter’s argument does use and rework an active-passive binary and reproduces anxieties of empire in its suggestion that one must dominate or risk being dominated. The title itself frames consumption in the language of conquest. Although Henry Salt had different motivations, he, far more than Carpenter, recognizes the political stakes of diet and deliberately uses highly charged phrasing in his writing on the subject of diet and animal slaughter. Salt worked tirelessly for the rights of animals, publishing two critical works on the subject, including *Flesh or Fruit? An Essay on Food Reform* (1888), *Animals’ Rights*

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<sup>126</sup> Edward Carpenter, “Health a Conquest,” *Seed-Time* 12 (1892): 9-12. Carpenter proceeds to worry that a diet of solely vegetables and porridges could lead to a “weak, flaccid nature, so the vitality of fruit is best.”

*Considered in Relation to Social Progress* (1892), and *The Logic of Vegetarianism* (1897). In *Animals' Rights*, Salt connects the persistence of blood sport with a national anxiety about the preservation of “manliness” as defined through violence and butchery: “It is often said that the manliness of our national character would be injuriously affected by the discontinuance of these sports—a strange argument, when one considers the very unequal, and therefore unmanly, conditions of the strife.”<sup>127</sup> Considering the quotation in light of the title, social progress aligns with gender equality or at least the abandonment of rigid conforming to a highly specific model of masculinity. Salt positions blood sport as the antithesis of civilization, thus pitting the cant of Tory imperialist jingoism against the practice of casual hunting: “Such actions may be pardonable in a savage, or in a schoolboy in whom the savage nature still largely predominates, but they are wholly unworthy of a civilized and rational man.”<sup>128</sup> The Englishman here becomes the savage depicted as the figure in need of colonization in Victorian political dialogue. A graduate of Eton College and Cambridge University, Salt assimilates and reframes the British Empire as a source of brute savagery.<sup>129</sup> By tying this argument to one of manliness, Salt draws out the link between hunting for sport and a national anxiety surrounding masculinity, one into which Sharp, too, deftly taps in her story “The Hundredth Princess.”

First appearing in *Pall Mall Magazine* in 1898 and then collected in Sharp’s fairy tale collection *The Other Side of the Sun* (1899), “The Hundredth Princess” situates the action of the story within a familiar Fabian framework related to animals and consumption. Sharp opens her

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<sup>127</sup> Henry S. Salt, *Animals' Rights* (London: Macmillan, 1894), 56.

<sup>128</sup> Salt, *Animals' Rights*, 56.

<sup>129</sup> Salt also opens his book with an extensive quotation from Edward Carpenter’s poem, *Towards Democracy* (1883), showing just how interconnected all these Fabian writers were during the 1890s.

story with the forest creatures themselves and their anxieties. Even nature has rearranged itself. The rabbits are born with their hearts in their mouths, so terrified are they of the King, a hunting enthusiast. The King represents a brutish form of masculinity unchecked until he encounters the Green Enchantress, a hyper-feminine counterpart to the king's blood sport: "Every animal in the forest, from the largest wild boar down the smallest baby-rabbit, was a friend of hers; and it made her dreadfully unhappy when she saw them being killed just to amuse the King."<sup>130</sup> Clearly, the portrait of wild animals presents a highly romanticized version of nature in the fairy tale, but in a space designed for transparent metaphor, the narrator takes this binary and, much as in the gender-driven tales discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, subverts that binary to locate a space between the two. Rather than recapitulate earlier arguments, I draw attention to this tale to demonstrate how Sharp consistently engages with political arguments and debates central to Fabian concerns.

Part of this Fabian articulation rests in the socialist critique of Tory nationalism displayed through excessive masculinity, one emphatically aristocratic and performed through blood sport. The King of Sharp's tale embodies all these problems. Even when he encounters and finds himself drawn to the animal-loving Green Enchantress, he does not have a sense of how to approach or understand women: "He knew very little about girls, for he had spent all his life in killing things, but he had a sort of idea that the girl in green was not much like the princesses who came to court."<sup>131</sup> The conflict between a male perception of women as objects and women as psychologically complex agents comes to the forefront in this section and is consistent with both Sharp's fairy tales and her contemporary short fiction dating from the same period. Kate

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<sup>130</sup> Sharp, "The Hundredth Princess," 49-50.

<sup>131</sup> Sharp, "The Hundredth Princess," 50.

Krueger, a scholar of literature and gender studies, notes: “Mediating between everyday realities of working conditions and urban visions of chance encounters, Sharp takes the fin-de-siècle reader behind these projections in order to narrate the perspective of misread women. Rather than mysterious objects of titillation, the protagonists in Sharp’s *Yellow Book* stories are clearly subjects who make crucial professional and personal choices.”<sup>132</sup> Although “The Hundredth Princess” situates its conflict in an enchanted wood rather than on the omnibus of Sharp’s “A Dull Brown,” both heroines must contend with male expectations of femininity that conflict with their lived realities. Admittedly, the tale does fall back on an extreme binary between masculine violence and feminine conciliation, but this is a Victorian construction, not Sharp’s, and one the narrator ridicules and subverts. At first, the Green Enchantress decides quite practically to enact a fitting revenge of the Greek tradition and, reproducing the Artemis and Actaeon story, transform the King into a wild boar so the hunter becomes the hunted. Strangely, however, the Green Enchantress fails to enchant the King except in a metaphorical, romantic sense. Critically, this prevents the enchantress from reproducing and extending a cycle of violence. Thwarted by her ineffectual magic, the enchantress rather nonsensically decides to go to the palace to meet the King again. When she asks a male magician to transform her into a princess, he informs her that he cannot: “Nobody can make a real princess,—not even the Fairy Queen herself. Real princesses make themselves, and that is a very different matter.”<sup>133</sup> The Green Enchantress thus learns of her own agency and, in an unusual twist on the fairy tale, she must take a series of actions that position her to ascend a throne without any magical aid whatsoever.

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<sup>132</sup> Kate Krueger, “Evelyn Sharp’s Working Women and the Dilemma of Urban Romance,” *Women’s Writing* 19, no. 4 (November 2012): 565, accessed 21 March 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2012.740860>.

<sup>133</sup> Sharp, “The Hundredth Princess,” 56.

Sharp's story slyly suggests that reform may take place without preternatural means. Thus, the Green Enchantress decides to go to the court as a scullery-maid, hoping to woo the king, who, equally besotted, becomes distracted enough that he ceases with his hunting. Whereas the king initially sought to destroy, once the Green Enchantress appears as a mere mortal with real human concerns (the cook physically abuses her when she selects the wrong ingredients), the king recognizes her vulnerability and responds to that more than he previously responded to the violent domination of animals. Krueger notes that the ability for characters to move outside traditional, Victorian-modeled social or gender roles, both enables and threatens budding romance: "It seems that the flaws of the courtship dramatized by Sharp are not created by the women who take on false identities, but by the men who fail to recognize them."<sup>134</sup> Neither the Green Enchantress nor the king can recognize each other's true selves in the forest, an odd and interesting inversion of English Renaissance dramatic convention that shifts the dramatic action from court to forest to remove social boundaries and facilitate romance. Instead, they learn to recognize each other in the very shadow of the palace itself. The two formerly powerful figures spend their time hiding from the cook in the palace vegetable path. When a huntsman tries to tempt the king to resume his former pastime of hunting, the king rejects the opportunity, telling his chief huntsman that he will remain in the palace gardens: "What hunt? I am going to pick the vegetables for my dinner, and that is ever so much more important!"<sup>135</sup> Although the story never goes so far as to fully transform the court into a legion of vegetarians, which would work in antithesis to Sharp's own treatise on the fairy tale "as it should be," the king does spend his time in the vegetable kingdom and primarily focused on love rather than

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<sup>134</sup> Krueger, "Working Women," 576.

<sup>135</sup> Sharp, "The Hundredth Princess," 61.



killing.<sup>136</sup> Part of this stems from the key point that the king does not hunt for the pleasure of eating, but the delight in killing. The scullery-maid née enchantress and King spend so much time in the gardens that the King loses interest in hunting altogether: “The chief huntsman and all the other huntsmen had never been so dull in their lives; but the wild boars and all the other animals were as happy as the day was long. Even the rabbits began to pop their heads above the bracken, and were quite amazed when they found that no one was waiting to kill them.”<sup>137</sup>

Though not among Sharp’s most sophisticated fairy tales, this story mixes female agency (the enchantress does indeed reveal herself to be a princess through merit, and is then made a queen through marriage) and critiques of masculinity with the larger, highly gendered dialogue surrounding blood sport. Like Carpenter and Salt, Sharp’s story advocates a more peaceable kingdom through the ending of blood sport.

“The Hundredth Princess” extended past the page and ultimately took a turn as a private theatrical performed during a political event at the home of Welsh M.P. Ellis Griffith. The journalist who provides the one record of the performance describes the scene:

It was indeed a delightful idea of Mr. Ellis Griffith, the popular M.P. for Anglesey, and his charming and gifted wife, known to fame in the singing world as Miss Mary Owen, to bring the spirit of fairy enchantment and old-world romance over the lilies and bushes of their pretty garden in the Avenue Road,

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<sup>136</sup> Sharp makes her stance on overtly moderns campaigns within the fairy tale quite clear: “And what, for the most part, are these modern legends? Metaphysical disquisitions, in which the ogres have become vegetarians, and the wizards are transformed into spiritualists; delusive discourses, in which the old-fashioned magician is an argumentative Free Thinker, and the time-worn dwarf is a Home Ruler in disguise; stories which would require a matured brain, with a taste for conundrums, to unravel” (*Fairy Tales: As They Are, as They Were, and as They Should Be*, 3).

<sup>137</sup> Sharp, “The Hundredth Princess,” 64.

Regent's Park, and give their two hundred guests the opportunity of wandering from the prosaic present into that fascinating period Once upon a Time. To this end they sought the aid of that clever young writer of fairy-tales, Miss Evelyn Sharp [...] Miss Evelyn Sharp had written a fairy-play in one act, called "The Green Enchantress," [...] It seemed, therefore, not at all unnatural that when the young King, who ignored affairs of state, thought all girls alike, and gave up his life to the chase, lay down on a bench to sleep before going a-hunting, the beautiful Green Enchantress, who lived among the wild beasts in the forest, should come to bewilder the King, and try to transform him into a wild boar, so that he should learn what the beasts must suffer when they are hunted."<sup>138</sup>

In this iteration, the king's obsession with blood sport has so enthralled him that he becomes a negligent monarch. Clearly, the theatrical production had a far darker take on blood sport as antithetical to harmonious and productive rule in the story's later incarnation. Ultimately, the enchantress reveals to the king that she originally wished to bewitch him to stop him killing animals. The story ends simply with the king's declaration that he will never kill anything again. The rabbits swallow their hearts once more and nature and rule are put to rights. The revolution of vegetables may not transpire, but a reform of the hunting culture certainly does. The ability of men and women to recognize each other as equally capable social and political allies recurs in Sharp's short stories and novels, but perhaps most explicitly in her story "The Country of Nonamia."

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<sup>138</sup> "The Green Enchantress," *Sketch* 23 (1898): 81.

## Castles in the Air and the Country of Nonamia

Among the many fairylands—and Sharp and other Fabians never rely on one definitive socialist or anti-socialist imagined world—that populate Sharp’s canon, Nonamia is the only specific imagined country that appears twice. Readers first encounter Nonamia in “The Restless River,” in the *Yellow Book* in 1897.<sup>139</sup> The country of Nonamia subsequently reappeared in “The Country Called Nonamia,” collected in Sharp’s fairy tale anthology *All the Way to Fairyland*.<sup>140</sup> Of the two, “The Restless River” follows a traditional fairy tale pattern and does not distinguish itself as one of Sharp’s explicitly socialist works, though it contains decidedly feminist overtones. First, I situate “The Restless River” in relation to Sharp and her work for the *Yellow Book*. Second, I will discuss “The Country of Nonamia” as an explicitly Fabian work, but one with direct ties to *Yellow Book* tradition.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the *Yellow Book* first appeared in 1894, helmed by literary editor Henry Harland, a gregarious American writer, and art editor Aubrey Beardsley, whose name would become synonymous with Decadent illustration and block prints. The announcement for the first volume clearly states the intent for a “daring” literary publication: “And while THE YELLOW BOOK will seek always to preserve a delicate, decorous, and reticent mien and conduct, it will at the same time have the courage of its modernness, and not tremble at the frown of Mrs. Grundy.”<sup>141</sup> This dance between traditional

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<sup>139</sup> Evelyn Sharp, “The Restless River,” *Yellow Book* 12 (January 1897): 167-90.

<sup>140</sup> Evelyn Sharp, “The Country of Nonamia,” in *All the Way to Fairyland* (London: The Bodley Head, 1898): 71-86.

<sup>141</sup> John Lane, “Prospectus,” *Yellow Book* 1 (April 1894): i-iii.

periodical and a locus for experimentation with unconventional themes provided writers such as Sharp and Nesbit with enormous artistic freedom. As noted in her work on the history of the *Yellow Book*, its publications and its contributors, Katherine Lyon Mix notes: “Much of this experimentation undertaken by *Yellow Book* writers was awkward and unconvincing, but it opened up new ground. These tentative approaches in the nineties led to the free discussion of sex taken for granted by every writer today.”<sup>142</sup> The quarterly allowed Sharp to put critiques of society’s treatment of working or influential women at the forefront of her stories, Mrs. Grundy’s frowns notwithstanding.

Not only does Sharp draw attention in her *Yellow Book* tales to the ways in which the male gaze objectifies female characters in “The Other Anna” and “In Dull Brown,” she turns the gaze back on the voyeurs.<sup>143</sup> This plays into a larger cultural dialogue underway in late Victorian England that questioned the role gender played in aesthetic culture. In her examination of Wilde and the *Yellow Book* writers, Ledger notes: “[A]s the cultural history of *The Yellow Book* suggests, aestheticism and Decadence were part of an avant-gardist cultural formation thoroughly peopled by women as literary and artistic subjects, not simply as objects of the male Decadent gaze.”<sup>144</sup> The freedom of expression enjoyed by female contributors, though, was not without its own complications related to gender and sex.

Though a literary haven for new and rising stars in the aesthetic circle that contributed the *Yellow Book*, the Bodley Head also faced confrontation within its female ranks. Ella D’Arcy took

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<sup>142</sup> Katherine Lyon Mix, *A Study in Yellow* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1960), 278.

<sup>143</sup> Krueger, “Working Women,” 564.

<sup>144</sup> Sally Ledger, “Wilde Women and *The Yellow Book*: The Sexual Politics of Aestheticism and Decadence,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 50, no. 1 (2007): 23, accessed 2 April 2015: <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/elt/summary/v050/50.1ledger.html>.

part in the editorship of the quarterly, but this influential position forced her to confront the reality that though the *Yellow Book*'s pages might be a welcoming space for women, the editor's office was not always so conciliatory. The editorial decisions had their own contained gender conflicts, as Windholz notes in Ella D'Arcy's role in the shaping the *Yellow Book*'s content and publication: "D'Arcy's epistles suggest that although the *Yellow Book* generously promoted the work of women writers and artists, its editorial office was a place where a woman's status depended on male validation, where sexual politics sometimes influenced editorial decisions, and where female self-assertion was at least in D'Arcy's case, neither appreciated nor tolerated."<sup>145</sup> Lane's tendency to allow his personal affairs to impact the index of *Yellow Book* writers attracted notice, too: "His womanizing earned him the nickname 'Petticoat Lane,' and Evelyn Sharp remembered in later years how his female protégés regularly 'fell in and out of love' with him."<sup>146</sup> Interestingly, the backstage sexual politicking in the office at least superficially paralleled fiction in Sharp's "In Dull Brown" and "The Other Anna." Both the female protagonists, not unlike D'Arcy, hope for more acknowledgment for their work even as men respond to them primarily as objects of curiosity and sexual desire. In each story, the woman attempts to engage as an equal rather than as a passive recipient of the male gaze. These characters eschew competing with other women for attention, but such idealized interaction did not correspond with actual events. Windholz remarks: "In several of her unpublished letters, D'Arcy banters with Lane for neglecting her to socialize with his other female protégés—Evelyn

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<sup>145</sup> Anne M. Windholz, "The Women Who Would Be Editor: Ella D'Arcy and the *Yellow Book*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 116, accessed 2 April 2015: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20082914>.

<sup>146</sup> Windholz, "The Women Who Would Be Editor," 119.

Sharp, Netta Syrett, Victoria Cross (Vivien Cory).”<sup>147</sup> Within this context of the freedom for and competition engendered among the *Yellow Book*’s women contributors, Sharp writes and publishes “The Restless River,” which places a gender-inverted satire of Victorian social mores at the forefront.

“The Restless River” cleverly subverts the fairy tale’s traditional inversions and subjects these conventions to satiric scrutiny. The story opens with a queen determined to thwart her genre’s own tropes. The narrator introduces the “extremely original Queen” as empowered through her very refusal to follow generic mandates: “So the Queen of Nonamia had nothing to help her through life, except her own wits; she was not even beautiful, and her chief virtue was the patience she showed for the eternal stupidity of the Nonamiacs. There was a King of Nonamia, too, but no one knew anything about him, except that he was the husband of the Queen of Nonamia; and that, indeed, was the most distinctive thing that could be said about him.”<sup>148</sup> In this passage, the Queen rules, but no maternal impulse softens her relationships with her subjects. She does not rule through the aid of magic, benevolent fairies, or even generous wildlife. As the story points out, the queen had fairies who attended her christening but who also chose not to give gifts. The self-made woman, exactly like Sharp’s previous *Yellow Book* heroines, dominates the page. Though one could read the satire as potentially ventriloquizing misogynistic attitudes, I argue that instead the relationship between the queen and king actually serves as a satiric critique of the Victorian marriage. The gender roles, albeit for the satire’s sake, are inverted just to demonstrate how lunatic these gender roles were. When the queen talks about how she chose the king (who was the prince of a neighboring kingdom) based on his social

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<sup>147</sup> Windholz, “The Women Who Would Be Editor,” 121.

<sup>148</sup> Sharp, “The Restless River,” 167.

condition rather than beanstalk-scaling prowess or giant-slaying, she laughs: “Younger sons are greatly overrated, just because they are clever enough to do things. Who wants to marry a man because he can do things?”<sup>149</sup> Neither cleverness nor skill has any place in what clearly is intended to be a subservient partner, mainly utilized for breeding purposes.

As the queen prioritizes someone socially traditional rather than capable, she acts in direct parallel to her male fictional predecessor in “The Other Anna” and “In Dull Brown.” The king himself, as skewered by narrator, becomes a docile spouse, a gender non-normative angel of the hearth: “The King of Nonamia had not done very much before he married the Queen. But he came, when he was sent for; and, for the rest of his life, he only did what the Queen told him. And the Queen told him very little.”<sup>150</sup> The king exists to reflect the queen’s desires. Certainly, the situation has its own parallels to Victoria’s consort, Albert, but the prince had been over thirty years dead by time of the tale’s publication. To confirm that the satire takes specific aim at gender roles, the queen proceeds, upon the birth of her son, to commission a fairy godfather rather than a fairy godmother. The queen comments that the arrangement circumvents the sororal competition that she would face with another woman: “Why not a fairy godfather? I could manage a godfather, but a godmother would want to manage me, and I could not endure that for a moment.”<sup>151</sup> This commentary on the rivalry between women for power and influence is important for two reasons. The first evokes the real struggles between D’Arcy, who wanted to wield more significant editorial influence, and those female writers and artists also vying for his attention, which by Windholz’s account shifted according to Lane’s changing sexual

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<sup>149</sup> Sharp, “The Restless River,” 168.

<sup>150</sup> Sharp, “The Restless River,” 168.

<sup>151</sup> Sharp, “The Restless River,” 168.

predilections. The second reason is that “The Restless River” draws attention to the mismatched power dynamics between men and women, whereas when Sharp revisits Nonamia, her new story prioritizes the young woman and man colluding to achieve social justice rather than hindering each other’s progress. Sharp’s shifting and dynamic interest in how relationships between the sexes may both hinder and advance political causes echoes her grounding in the *Yellow Book* tradition. As Ledger observes:

The conflicting cultural trends embodied by *The Yellow Book* mean that it is a symptomatic rather than more simply a representative cultural product of the 1890s. The clash of the “old” and the “new” that characterizes *fin-de-siècle* cultural politics more generally is played out in microcosm in the pages of *The Yellow Book*. It may have adopted the color of “the wicked and decadent French novel” and it may have been culturally identified as representing “all that was outrageously modern,” but *The Yellow Book* was, more complexly and more interestingly, a site for the most significant cultural dialogues and conflicts of the *fin-de-siècle*.<sup>152</sup>

To conclude my chapter on Sharp, I accordingly turn to one of her most modest but politically charged fairy tales that draws attention the problem of poor housing and the challenges of social reform, when operating within gender binaries. The world of “The Restless River” reappears as the location for a more directly socialist tale in “The Country of Nonamia.” In this story, the princess protagonist longs to build a magical castle and seeks out a magician in order to make her vision a reality. During his misadventures, a traveler whom the princess encounters determines to build what he terms “real” houses for the homeless. Whereas castles in

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<sup>152</sup> Ledger, “Wilde Women and *The Yellow Book*,” 9.



the air are fanciful and inconvenient, for the traveler “real houses” means accessible and built to meet necessity, not whimsy. He explains: “‘I have no time to build castles in the air,’ he said. ‘I build real houses for other people to live in, people who would, perhaps, have no houses at all if I did not build them. That is more important than building castles in the air for one’s self.’”<sup>153</sup> With his declaration, the traveler positions himself as a reformer and the princess’s desires as selfish and valueless. The traveler continues on his social mission to house the homeless while the princess steadfastly focuses on finding her “castle in the air,” which carries tones of both utopian idealism and flippant fancy. Interestingly, the story’s focus on “castles in the air” takes the phrase from Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854), one of the most critical canonical works of American Romanticism.

I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your

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<sup>153</sup> Evelyn Sharp, “The Country Called Nonamia,” in *All the Way to Fairyland* (London: The Bodley Head, 1898), 13.

work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.<sup>154</sup>

Sharp allusively links “The Country of Nonamia” to one of the quintessential works of American Romanticism, and in this way she aligns *Walden* with a socialist fairy tale. The Fabian interest in American writers, in addition to Thoreau, included Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Walt Whitman (1819-1892). Sumpter has noted the impact of American Romantics on socialist literature and cites the influence of Thoreau and Whitman in British socialism during the fin de siècle, particularly in Robert Blatchford’s pamphlet in *Clarion, The New Religion* (1897): “Thoreau’s mystic nature writings and Whitman’s poetic expression of an immanent, democratic religion, with nature as a window on a personal Divine, were key inspirations for the Labour Church’s conception of free religion.”<sup>155</sup> The influence of Thoreau extended among socialists in general, but especially Fabians like Sharp’s close friend Edward Carpenter. Egbert writes of Carpenter’s trips to the United States to meet Whitman and Thoreau, noting in particular the impact the latter had on Carpenter: “Because Whitman has since been claimed by the anarchists, as well as by the Marxian communists, it was appropriate that Carpenter should become Whitman’s chief English disciple, for Carpenter also greatly admired Thoreau, that unique exemplar of an American kind of individualist anarchy.”<sup>156</sup> Complicating Egbert’s observation, though, is the Fabian discomfort with anarchy, dismissed most famously by Shaw in a Fabian tract, *The Impossibilities of Anarchy* (1893): “The conflict between ideal Socialism and practical

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<sup>154</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854), 346.

<sup>155</sup> Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale*, 107.

<sup>156</sup> Donald Drew Egbert, *Social Radicalism and the Arts* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 438.

Social-Democracy destroyed the Chartist organization half a century ago, as it destroyed the Socialist League only the other day.”<sup>157</sup> Rather than Thoreauvian anarchy, “The Country of Nonamia” explores *Walden*’s direction to pursue the imagined life. The princess determines that she, too, may have a castle in the air and her quest resonates with socialist and suffragist concerns about sweating—now known as sweatshop work—and the domestic space during the fin de siècle.

Though the conflict between real houses and castles in the air may initially seem playful, during the 1890s the Fabian Society developed a particular interest in the labor conditions of those doing sweating work. As noted by numerous reports and the Fabians themselves, employers relocated the work to the homes of the employees, thus escaping regulation of working conditions. Fabian Tract number 50 observes the appalling exploitation and problems with hygiene:

In all these cases the workers labor, not in a mill or factory provided by the capitalist employer, but in a room in a tenement house, or a small workshop provided by themselves. In all instances of sweating, the actual work-places escape, either by defects in the law or the imperfection of its administration, from the regulation and control of the Factory Acts. Such work-places are generally insanitary, overcrowded, devoid of proper conveniences, badly ventilated and lighted, and ill-supplied with water.<sup>158</sup>

In addition to the wretched conditions of the tenements, the Fabian Society revisited the issue of overcrowding again in Sidney Webb’s *Labor in the Longest Reign*. Webb argues that the housing

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<sup>157</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *The Impossibilities of Anarchy* (London: The Fabian Society, 1893), 4.

<sup>158</sup> The Fabian Society, *Sweating: Its Cause and Remedy* (London: The Fabian Society, 1895), 4.

problem poses a dilemma for socialism's progress, too. He writes: "It is nearly impossible to get good citizenship, good trade unionism, or good co-operation out of a one-roomed home. Until we can secure to these unfortunates the conditions of elementary decency we can count upon no real progress in their civilization."<sup>159</sup> The Society went on to produce specialized tract *Houses for the People* (1897) incorporating statistical data on overcrowding from major English cities. The Fabians repeatedly point out that the home no longer is a domestic space used for solely domestic work. Labor encroachment makes these homes into dangerous workspaces. Women's rights and worker's rights overlap in the modified home. By 1900, women's groups within the Fabian Society drew attention to the home itself. Though it traditionally operated as a space for women's domestic work during the day, houses were not designed with women's interests in mind: "Everybody who has built a house knows how completely men overlook points of domestic accommodation which strike a woman at once. Men live in houses: they do not work in them. Women do work in them; and a house built without consulting them is seldom as it might be made."<sup>160</sup> Here we see the crux of the dilemma: the princess longs for a space that she has imagined and that might suit her own needs, not those of someone else. The wandering princess in Nonamia searches for what Virginia Woolf in 1928 famously termed "a room of one's own."<sup>161</sup> She wants a space that matches her own needs and interests. This is, though, as Sharp's story makes clear, easier wished than accomplished.

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<sup>159</sup> Sidney Webb, *Labor in the Longest Reign (1837-1897)* (London: The Fabian Society, 1897), 17.

<sup>160</sup> The Fabian Municipal Program, *Women as Councillors* (London: The Fabian Society, 1900), 3.

<sup>161</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London, The Hogarth Press, 1929).

Much like Sharp's "The Boy Who Looked like a Girl," "The Country of Nonamia" opens with an ancillary character whose views and antagonism serve as a foil for the protagonist. When the princess arrives on the doorstep of the magician's castle in the air, he, like the Beech Tree Giant, dismisses the young person in front of him. The princess longs to build a castle in the air, but without any direct experience, she seeks to construct something entirely outside of her experience. Given the echoes of Thoreau in her desire for a "castle in the air," her ensuing conversation with the magician takes on a philosophical quality:

"You see, I have never been able to find my own castle in the air, so when the West Wind told me about yours I asked him to blow me here. May I come in and see what it is like?"

"Certainly not," said the magician, hastily. "It is not like anything; and even if it were, I should not let you come in. Don't you know that, if you were to enter another person's castle in the air, it would vanish away like a puff of smoke?"

"Oh dear!" sighed the Princess. "I did so want to know what a real castle in the air was like. I wonder if yours is at all like mine!"<sup>162</sup>

The Princess, though she has a vision for her own iteration of this idealized space, has neither the power to build it nor the ability to enter into an existing one for reference. Excluded from another's vision of home, she wanders on to search for other options. As she elaborates on her castle in the air, her desires are not flippant. She articulates her need for a home that centers on her own emotional needs—a room for laughing, a room for crying, a room to be serious. She needs rooms where she may have the freedom to express herself and read books.

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<sup>162</sup> Sharp, "Country Called Nonamia," 4.

For both the magician and the traveler, the princess's castle in the air does not represent her freedom so much as a place for her to remain sequestered. When the traveler locates the magician to learn of the princess's whereabouts, the magician demands to know whether the traveler, too, will impose on him for his own castle in the air:

“I don't want a castle in the air,” laughed the stranger. “People who spend their lives in building real houses never have time to build castles in the air! *I* want to find the Princess not the castle.”

“That you will never do as long as she is happy in it,” said the magician.

“People who live in castles in the air are never to be found, unless they have grown tired of living in them.”<sup>163</sup>

Yet for the princess, the isolation of her castle in the air precludes happiness. Instead of the paradise that she imagined, she finds herself struggling with the isolation. Her castle, built by someone else, becomes a place of entrapment with happiness packed so tightly that it suffocates her and almost every room is one to cry in.<sup>164</sup> Her statement resonates with the Fabian tracts in which the Society notes how domestic spaces, meant to be a place of happiness and refuge for women, often fail to meet women's needs. The princess envisioned her castle in the air, but, since it was built by another person, her vision and the resulting creation mismatch terribly. When the traveller finally does find the princess, she complains that she finds herself unhappy and isolated in the air palace of her imagining and the traveller laughs when she asks about his castle in the air: “I have no time to build castles in the air,” he said. “I build real houses for other people to live in, people who would, perhaps, have no houses at all if I did not build them. That

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<sup>163</sup> Sharp, “Country Called Nonamia,” 11.

<sup>164</sup> Sharp, “Country Called Nonamia,” 12.

is more important than building castles in the air for one's self.”<sup>165</sup> However, as the princess quickly learns, although the traveler builds houses for the homeless, no one wants to live in them. His emphasis on sturdiness and speed show an obsession with function and fails to take into account the emotional needs of those who would inhabit the real houses that he builds. In a twist on *Walden*, the traveler can build foundations, but he requires the princess to understand that even the poor deserve the ambition of a “castle in the air.” The two set out to work together, building houses for the homeless that have both foundations and the possibility of happiness once the traveler takes into account the princess' injunction that houses also should be built for happiness and not purely utilitarian reasons.

Although more traditionally masculine male characters in Sharp's canon often begin as antagonists, most of them show potential for reform and the ability to collaborate with women, ones who always maintain their own, distinct ambitions. Sharp makes use of the fairy tale and children's story in order to weave satiric critiques of fin-de-siècle rules for gender normativity into what are perceived as safer, more traditional genres. Whether the character is a princess who longs to construct castles in the air, an animal-loving enchantress, or a boy who looks like a girl, each explores how she or he can find a way to be recognized outside of coded behavior.

Although the romance may be seen as central to some of these stories, the romance never serves to overthrow the socialist goals of each tale. Instead, the romance only happens after at least one character undergoes a paradigmatic shift. The romance is less about marriage and childbirth than it is about women and men serving as allies, not enemies. This perhaps is what Sharp had in mind when she imagined the true “antithesis of cricket.”

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<sup>165</sup> Sharp, “Country Called Nonamia,” 13.

## Chapter Two

### “More Like a Boy Than a Book”: Nesbit’s Reshaping of Popular Fictional Genres

He is doing the world’s work eternal  
That the first dawn of soul saw begun;  
He is hastening the hour when the children  
The battles we lost will have won:  
When the deeds that we did not, and could not,  
Those small hands—grown strong—will have done.<sup>1</sup>

E. Nesbit’s poem “A Word for the Future” sets out a specific vision of socialism, one realized through the raising of children into politically conscious and socially capable adults. The poem, first anthologized in Nesbit’s *Leaves of Life* (1888) and reprinted in *Ballads and Lyrics of Socialism* (1908), concludes with the child as the destined political warrior, ready, if properly taught, to assume the mantle of socialism and succeed where Fabians had not yet.<sup>2</sup> The positing of the child as a necessary participant in socialist thought—and an adept one—is one of the most striking and essential tropes of Nesbit’s canon. The child as the center of this necessary reform shifts from novel to novel. In Nesbit’s most famous novels, the protagonists are children from

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<sup>1</sup> E. Nesbit, “A Word for the Future,” in *Ballads and Lyrics of Socialism 1883-1908* (London: The Fabian Society, 1908), 63-4.

<sup>2</sup> The *Leaves of Life* collection clearly gestures toward Walt Whitman’s famous *Leaves of Grass* (1855), though the anthology does not show any other direct correlation with Whitman’s far more expansive work. Nesbit wrote several socialist poems, such as “A Word for the Future” (*Leaves of Life* [London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888], 93-95.).



middle-class families living in reduced circumstances until, through the social and political efforts of the children, their fortunes reverse, or at least improve. The Bastable children from the *Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899) and the *New Treasure Seekers* (1904) fit this description as their newly widowed father struggles, as do those in *The Railway Children* (1906). In the Psammead trilogy—*Five Children and It* (1902), the *Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904), and the *Story of the Amulet* (1906)—the children occupy a very similar economic status as they have magically wish-fueled adventures. The Bastables and the children in the Psammead trilogy consistently display empathy, charitable giving and receiving, and a marked interest in righting wrongs they have observed once they grow up. In this sense, they embody the Fabian sentiment of Nesbit’s poem “A Word for the Future.” After the publication of the *Treasure Seekers* and the Psammead trilogy, however, there is a noticeable shift in Nesbit’s writing for children. Whereas the children of these early books occupy a whimsical universe where wishes have mild consequences and helpful adults abound, the *Enchanted Castle* (1907) and *Harding’s Luck* (1909) focus on children who must navigate adult interference as threats to their agency. Instead, the “small hands—grown strong” already are possessed by these children as they navigate morally complicated situations largely without adult assistance or intervention. The children of *The Enchanted Castle* and Dickie in *Harding’s Luck* importantly have a more sophisticated understanding of storytelling and how their choices—and those of others—limit or enhance their agency. Their choices are consciously informed, too, by the political realities of their decisions, and the social injustice they have witnessed. I have chosen these two novels to focus on as they are written in close conjunction and both show a shift to the child characters making small but significant reforms—or attempts to reform—their worlds.

At the center of this chapter is a detailed discussion of Nesbit's reformations of popular narrative conventions in two of her later and less well known novels: *The Enchanted Castle* and *Harding's Luck*. The former features a mix of middle-class children and a working-class girl. The latter's hero is a disabled yet adventurous slum child. Both books show the children as acutely aware of the child-adult power dynamics at play and, in at least this way, are consistent with Nesbit's fiction for both children and adults. As observed in the 1909 review of Nesbit's short story collection, *These Little Ones*, the book review for the weekly socialist periodical the *New Age*, Nesbit "is a critic of the child mind." "Foolish people," the reviewer George Allen adds, "are so apt to talk of the mysterious primrose path, and of the delightful simplicity of childhood that we tend to overlook the truth, that the child is, as the author would have us believe, a very serious person, one who reads [Walter] Scott, who is very critical, capable, indeed, of scientific analysis, one to whom life is, in fact, anything but a gay awakening."<sup>3</sup> Even though the review focuses on *These Little Ones*, Allen speaks more broadly to Nesbit's canon and identifies a central quality in Nesbit's children's literature and that of her fellow Fabians: the child as a capable reader developing her or his critical awareness and political consciousness. In this chapter, I begin by comparing the ways in which Nesbit's Fabian interest in the politically conscious child diverges from Sharp's fascination with contesting gender binaries. Nesbit is certainly eager to see children become highly capable agents in a world increasingly transformed through the socialist thought. This is a point that emerges strongly in her little-known prose work on childhood and imaginative play, *Wings and the Child* (1913). Such empowering forms of play are central to *The Enchanted Castle*, which occupies the subsequent section of this chapter, though the main points that emerges from this novel is the child protagonists' remarkable ability

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<sup>3</sup> George Allen, Review of Nesbit, *These Little Ones*, *New Age* 5, no. 4 (1909): 82.

to scrutinize and rework the generic conventions of popular fiction including the boy's adventure story, the girls' boarding school novel, detective fiction, and Gothic romance. Thereafter, I proceed to explore Nesbit's next major attempt to show how a disabled child from a working-class background can undergo an imaginative transformation when he travels back in time to a Stuart world. *Harding's Luck*, which is arguable one of Nesbit's most ambitious novels, presents an intellectual challenge—albeit a highly problematic one—to the Fabian Society's interest in utilitarianism. The story of Dickie Harding reveals that he imagines himself as the hero of exactly those popular genres that would seek to marginalize him, even as he seeks to rewrite the familiar tropes of the disability narrative that had become familiar through many famous Victorian works, most notably Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843).

### **Evelyn Sharp and E. Nesbit and the Iterations of the Fabian Child**

When scholars discuss the founding of the Fabian Society, female authors—apart from political commentator Beatrice Webb—typically receive short shrift, and Evelyn Sharp and Nesbit are no exceptions. More recent work by Sharp's and Nesbit's biographers—Angela V. John and Julia Briggs, respectively—has certainly noted the significant contributions of these two writers, and these biographers drawn out these writers' complicated relationship with each other as both socialists and literary figures. Both Sharp and Nesbit initially moved in overlapping social circles because of their connections with the Fabian Society and the *Yellow Book* as well as *Pall Mall Magazine* and the girls' periodical *Atalanta*, helmed by feminist writer L. T. Meade (1844-1914). Sharp wrote prose, while Nesbit's contributions during the same period were predominantly poems. During Nesbit's *Yellow Book* days, she experimented directly with the

coding of masculine and feminine. In the poem “Day and Night,” Nesbit inverts traditional symbolism to consider questions of female agency in romantic love. In this excerpt from the poem, the earth is depicted as female and the moon, her male lover:

She waited, dreaming, for the hour  
When Night, her love, should come to her ;  
When 'neath Night's mantle she should creep  
And feel his arms about her cling,  
When the soft tears true lovers weep  
Should make amends for everything.<sup>4</sup>

Notably, Nesbit’s girl characters are much less passive than the earth of her poem. Linda K. Hughes notes the unusual nature of the poem:

Nesbit here participates in decadence insofar as she celebrates transgressive sexual acts involving effeminate masculinity: the night, usually gendered feminine (in contrast to the virile power of the day), is here a seductive, sexually knowing presence that best understands how to make love to a woman. But Nesbit’s poem also chimes with that of [Katherine] de Mattos in suggesting the pairing of female agency and female secrecy in contrast to the female mystery and instrumental sexual availability often found in male decadent verse.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> E. Nesbit, “Day and Night,” *Yellow Book* 4 (January 1895): 260.

<sup>5</sup> Hughes, “Women Poets and Contested Spaces in the *Yellow Book*,” 856. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (1865-1921) was a writer and publisher most famous for his translations of Émile Zola’s novels.

Periodical publication offered greater visibility for women writers, particularly New Woman writers. Hughes discusses the reasons for the importance of periodical publications for these authors, but especially poets, in her scholarship on women contributors to the *Yellow Book*:

Amidst so much that is unclear, however, it is also important to remember that periodical publication freed New Woman poets to express radical content and intervene in contemporary debates via individual poems, the visibility of which could diminish when authors collected a wide range of poems in bound volumes that bore no evident relationship to contemporary events. Both periodicals and poems, then, were important media for New Woman writers.<sup>6</sup>

Yet though Sharp and Nesbit published in similar spaces, their views of socialism—particularly in respect to its relationship with suffragism—differed in attitude and execution and their portrayals of masculinity and femininity diverged, even as their fictions both emphasized the significance and right of the child to act as a political agent.

Sharp both embraced and reiterated the more radical politics of the *Yellow Book* coterie in her actions and aesthetics, which contrasted with Nesbit's alternatively progressive and regressive portrayals of gendered behavior. Briggs writes: "Thought Edith dabbled slightly with aestheticism, as became a lady of 'advanced' views, she was never really at home with its preciosity."<sup>7</sup> The relationship was not an antagonistic one, as evidenced by Nesbit's attempts to solicit work from Sharp for the *Neolith* (1907), where Nesbit served as literary editor, though

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<sup>6</sup> Hughes, "Women Poets and Contested Spaces in the *Yellow Book*," 866.

<sup>7</sup> Julia Briggs, *A Woman of Passion* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 175. Briggs goes on to discuss how Nesbit felt uncomfortable with anything that involved self-conscious, Jamesian "literariness" even though Nesbit did, as Briggs observes, experiment with her writing.

Nesbit clarified that she wanted work that eschewed anything of *Yellow Book* provocativeness.<sup>8</sup> Sharp did not contribute and the *Neolith* quickly disappeared within four issues of its initial publication. Sharp's lack of response may have been a result of her busy political work or the fact that troubling similarities bordering on plagiarism existed between Sharp's story the "Palace on the Floor," published in her fairy tale collection *The Other Side of the Sun* (1900), and Nesbit's "The Town in the Library..." which appeared the following year.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of their personal interactions, the two showed a notable divergence in their portrayals of gender.

As I explain in chapter 1, femininity and masculinity have enormous fluidity in Sharp's work and may be performed or expressed by boys, girls, women, and men. Certainly, gender binaries break down whereas in Nesbit's fiction. Yet the emphasis is specifically on boys' attempts to code masculine and feminine in accordance with Victorian sexual binaries. Thus the novels scrutinize these assumptions rather than radically transform presentations of gender fluidity. In her fiction, Nesbit advocates for girl characters to have the right to enact their own adventures and inhabit untraditional narratives. At the same time, her boy characters' relationships with femininity are far from untroubled. In *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), for example, Oswald's very Victorian and negative attitudes toward femininity come to the forefront. When Oswald and his brother, Noël encounter a woman on the train who, to Oswald's surprise demonstrates familiarity with Rudyard Kipling's first *Jungle Book* (1894), he admires her for her masculine behavior: "She didn't talk a bit like a real lady, but more like a jolly sort of grown-up boy in a dress and hat."<sup>10</sup> The lady poet in this description becomes cross-

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<sup>8</sup> Briggs, *A Woman of Passion*, 275.

<sup>9</sup> Briggs, *A Woman of Passion*, 328.

<sup>10</sup> Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers, Being the Adventures of the Bastable Children in*

dressed and infantilized, yet more palatable for seeming to be innately masculine. I do not mean to suggest that Nesbit's narrative endorses Oswald's view, but rather that the novel shows that Oswald's reading of the woman jars with reality and showcases the ways in which Oswald's limited ideas about gender might impact those around him. The woman on the train proceeds to reveal that she works as a poet. After reading Noël's verse, she praises him and gives him a note of introduction for the publisher whom Noël and Oswald plan to visit. For Oswald, the woman's opinions and speech are legitimized by talk and content that he immediately codes as masculine. Oswald controls the story operating both as narrator and main character and his point of view is highly subjective. He sees remunerative value in poetry and values it, but also dismisses poetry as a feminine vocation. When Oswald and Noël reach the publisher's office intending to sell the latter's poem, now vouched for in a note from their companion on the train, the publisher, to Oswald's horror, asks the following question:

“Which is the poet?”

I can't think how he could have asked. Oswald is said to be a very manly-looking boy for his age. However, I thought it would look duffing to be offended, so I said—

“This is my brother, Noël. He is the poet.”

Noël had turned quite pale. He is disgustingly like a girl in some ways.<sup>11</sup>

In his vacillation between first and third person narration, Oswald reveals several biases: in his view, to be a poet is to be feminine—a revolting association to Oswald, as made apparent by his commentary. Manliness for Oswald is the antithesis of poetry, reinforced by his vicious

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*Search of a Fortune* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899), 60.

<sup>11</sup> Nesbit, *Story of the Treasure Seekers*, 68-69.

dismissal of Noël as lesser for being “like a girl.” For Oswald, no boy should look—or behave—like a girl. Although, as I argue, Nesbit places primacy on socialism over suffragism, moments like Oswald’s interactions with the woman poet reveal that Nesbit’s emphasis on the political disenfranchisement of the middle and working classes did not negate her interest in gender parity, too.

Scholarship on Nesbit’s fiction has certainly engaged with the portrayals of gendered identities and behaviors that stand at the center of her most popular narratives. In her analysis of the Psammead trilogy, Claudia Nelson, who has written extensively on gender and Victorian childhood, notes that in spite of Nesbit’s sometimes troubling privileging of masculinity, Nesbit embraces a more egalitarian stance in these novels: “Implicit in all these instances is not deficiency but superabundance of gender: completeness, Nesbit implies, consists of combining the virtues of maleness with those of femaleness, not rejecting one for the other.”<sup>12</sup> Although both Nelson and Briggs note that Nesbit’s portrayals of gender performance have greater flexibility after the Psammead trilogy, Nesbit’s fiction leans toward the development of Fabian child characters whose interests lie less in matters of gender and more in questions of class inequalities and economics. A determination to put socialism first and suffragism second was consistent in both Nesbit’s fiction and her personal politics. In response to Sharp’s request that Nesbit sign a petition to the Prime Minister Asquith in favor of the 1910 Conciliation Bill—which aimed to provide limited suffrage for affluent, property-owning women—Nesbit sent an explicit rejection, claiming that socialism precluded suffragism and might even empower women

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<sup>12</sup> Claudia Nelson, “Ideologies of Gender in the Psammead Trilogy,” in *E. Nesbit’s Psammead Trilogy*, ed. Raymond E. Jones (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 12.



who would vote against socialist causes.<sup>13</sup> What I wish to draw from these discussions and the comparison with Sharp is that whereas gender plays a central role in Sharp's body of work, for Nesbit socialist interests consistently supersede suffragist concerns. In spite of this divide, however, the Fabian child for these two very different socialist authors remains, in Allen's words, critical and capable.

### ***Wings and the Child and The Enchanted Castle***

*The Enchanted Castle*, which was serialized in the highly popular *Strand Magazine*, has remained critically undervalued. Even Nesbit felt that the work had not fulfilled her ambitions as it veered toward horror with the appearance of the Ugli-Wuglis, a point that Briggs notes.<sup>14</sup> The Ugli-Wuglis—creatures that seem to be a cross between mummies and malevolent ghosts—disturb the children so much that the promise of magic to empower the boys and girl almost becomes lost. Until the magic dissolves at the novel's conclusion, one Ugli-Wugli escapes to London and becomes a businessman there as a veritable specter of capitalism. Yet for all of Nesbit's doubts about *The Enchanted Castle* being unwieldy fantasy, the novel is arguably her most critical examination of the child's ability to become "a very serious person." Buoyed by magic but grounded in the real anxieties of children, the novel places special emphasis on the child characters' abilities to understand the limitations and exclusions of genres. The protagonists quickly begin to question the very genres of popular fiction that lent such fame to the *Strand*, among the same pages in which the young protagonists' adventures unfold.

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<sup>13</sup> Briggs, *A Woman of Passion*, 334-35.

<sup>14</sup> Briggs, *A Woman of Passion*, 263.

Invested in both the child as protagonist and reader, *The Enchanted Castle* warrants close attention because it puts Nesbit's child readers in a position where they can read critically. They encounter not only works by such well-known figures as Walter Scott, but also the range of literary genres, such as detective fiction, which made the name of Sherlock Holmes synonymous with the *Strand*. Nesbit's story centers on three siblings—Gerald, Jimmy, and Kathleen—who have been placed at Kathleen's boarding school for the holiday. On their first adventure, the three discover and befriend Mabel, the niece of the housekeeper of a nearby castle, which serves as the locus for the novel's magic. All four of the children incorporate active storytelling into their own experiences throughout the narrative. Gerald, the eldest, takes this habit to such an extreme that he narrates his action in his speech, much to the chagrin of his siblings, which leads Nesbit's third-person adult narrator to interject: "Both the others were used to Gerald's way of telling a story while he acted it, but they did sometimes wish that he didn't talk quite so long and so like a book in moments of excitement."<sup>15</sup> Gerald's talking "like a book," however, crucially signifies the way in which he, as the self-invented protagonist of his imaginary narratives that draw on popular literary genres, must build a space for himself within those narrative worlds. Moreover, while the other children in *The Enchanted Castle* also critically engage with the fictional models that they have encountered through their reading, they, too, begin to recognize the promise as well as limits of certain literary genres for children in general, and girls in particular. Consequently, Nesbit's child protagonists negotiate and challenge the conventions of the detective story, the boy's adventure tale, the girl's school novel, and the Gothic romance, among several others. Over the course of Nesbit's fantastic tale, these critically adept characters eagerly engage in creating independent-minded imaginary adventures that draw on these

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<sup>15</sup> E. Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), 12.

different popular literary traditions. Increasingly, they learn to construct spaces for themselves whenever these popular genres fail to serve their needs. They soon come to recognize that adult interpretations of these particular genres frequently threaten to excise a child's own imaginative agency and innovative creativity from the narrative record.

*The Enchanted Castle* argues that children should be allowed to represent themselves in narrative not as idealized or hyper-dramatized figures but as part of a structure of storytelling that privileges the child's right to self-representation and imaginative empowerment. This aim becomes explicit in Nesbit's *Wings and the Child* (1913): her non-fiction meditation on children and imaginative play, where she states that "it is easy to die for your country, but the hard thing to do is live for your country, to live for its children."<sup>16</sup> Nesbit's striking remark comes toward the end of a critically neglected study of the need to reform early elementary education both in the home and the schoolroom. In her statement, she puts children at the forefront of social reform and rejects passivity as a valid attitude of patriotic action or display, thus extending the mission of social action and responsibility to the child, who must in turn receive the support of influential adults. Through their adventures and play in *The Enchanted Castle*, the siblings and Mabel participate in the very world-building and social reform that are the cornerstones of *Wings and the Child*. Crucial to Nesbit's powerful formulation is the idea that parents, caregivers, and educators should nurture each child's capacity for creative and narrative invention. To Nesbit, who remains deeply aware of the limited material resources available to the larger majority of pupils at state schools in Britain, children's transformation of ordinary objects—such as cigarettes, paper domes, broken crockery, disused cotton-reels, and old playing cards—enables

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<sup>16</sup> E. Nesbit, *Wings and the Child, Or the Building of Magical Cities* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), 179.

them to conceptualize and experience unfamiliar cultures and places. Through the use of books as bricks, old newspapers as robes, handkerchiefs as tents, and old chess pieces as decorative architecture, Nesbit also suggests that through the construction of magical cities, children can build an imaginary landscape in which all sorts of unreal events can intelligibly take place. By privileging the agency of the child, Nesbit advocates not only that adults live for their country's children, but that these children may live for themselves and take ownership of their right to self-determination.

Throughout much of Nesbit's fiction and non-fiction, children's agency drives the creative development of magical worlds. In order to recognize that they can critically interrogate genre as they try to embody it through their experiences, her child protagonists simultaneously understand that they have the ability and the right to reimagine the world. Such creative play has pragmatic aspects too, Nesbit insists, as an exploration of the whimsical and fantastic also will enable the child to grasp complex scientific concepts. When magicked rings and statues that stretch into life coexist with steam engines rumbling down railway tracks, it becomes possible for children to conceptualize the following thought-provoking question: "if electricity can move unseen through the air, why not carpets?"<sup>17</sup> Nesbit maintains that children can conjure the unseen by participating in forms of fantastic innovation, ones that allow them to understand invisible phenomena such as electricity. The counterpoint of technological advancement and fantasy play out directly in *The Enchanted Castle*. When the siblings begin on their adventure, the very title of the novel comes under debate through a conversation between the brothers: "I think magic went out when people began to have steam-engines," Jimmy insisted, 'and

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<sup>17</sup> Nesbit, *Wings and the Child*, 25.

newspapers, and telephones and wireless telegraphing.”<sup>18</sup> Jimmy the skeptic raises the stakes for the novel’s fantasy genre itself. Is electricity the death of the fairy tale? And yet in words Nesbit would later echo in *Wings and the Child*, Gerald expresses his own amazement in *The Enchanted Castle* when he must follow a bespelled Jimmy on the train to London: “‘I don’t understand,’ says Gerald, alone in his third-class carriage, ‘how railway trains and magic *can* go on at the same time.’ And yet they do.”<sup>19</sup> The novel’s children therefore both articulate the question and provide the answer for it by finding reconciliation in a co-existence. For Nesbit, scientific invention and knowledge therefore form a vital part of the magic of childhood in modernity. Moreover, to both Nesbit in *Wings and the Child* and her narrator in *The Enchanted Castle*, empirical fact and scientific inquiry may be accessed through a world of magic and make-believe—a world that constantly faces extinction or ruination through the chastening condemnation of small-minded adults who tend to read imaginative narratives in a restrictive and predictable manner.

Though parents exist only as absent figures in *The Enchanted Castle*, the specter of adult expectation and its attendant threats to the child’s right to act as an independent agent lead the novel’s children to attempt to construct their behavior in ways that match adult paradigms. Before the narrative can model a realistic view of childhood, it must critically examine and summarily reject mistaken adult idealizations of childhood. For Nesbit’s narrator, the figure that best embodies the antithesis of the real child is the eponymous hero of Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886). When Gerald seeks to convince the chaperone-in-residence, French governess Mademoiselle, that he and his siblings should be allowed outside, he

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<sup>18</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 190-91.

adopts the persona he believes will appeal to any adult: “Gerald could always make himself look interesting at a moment’s notice [. . .] It was done by opening his grey eyes rather wide, allowing the corners of his mouth to droop, and assuming a gentle, pleading expression, resembling that of the late little Lord Fauntleroy—who must, by the way, be quite old now, and an awful prig.”<sup>20</sup> Gerald’s adoption of Lord Fauntleroy’s demeanor is nothing short of damning. His posturing as the listless, sycophantic child adored by Burnett’s readers, especially mothers, is a shrewd calculation to appeal to what Gerald plainly understands is the adult’s ideal of the attractive young boy. Clearly, the narrator emphatically rejects an outdated and repellent impersonation of childhood heroism in Burnett’s work. Nor is this Nesbit’s first attack on the infamous Fauntelory. The fatherless, foppishly attired Albert-next-door in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* arrives with a Fauntleroy flourish: “Albert is always very tidy. He wears frilly collars and velvet knickerbockers. I can’t think how he can bear to.”<sup>21</sup> Unlike Sharp’s Boy in “The Boy Who Looked Like a Girl” (1897), Albert wears knickerbockers with priggish aplomb. Gerald, however, signifies a distinct and deliberate break with this superannuated model. In later episodes, Nesbit’s child protagonists exercise considerable freedom and courage, but these developments only occur when Gerald realizes that posing as Lord Fauntleroy negates his right as a child to exist outside adult intent. From this point on, the novel increasingly endorses the child’s right to autonomous play. The legitimacy of the child’s desire for autonomy in performance and play is a right of which Nesbit is one of literature’s staunchest defenders.

Both the non-fiction *Wings and the Child* and *The Enchanted Castle*, however, remain wary of the adult (or adult-like) critic that seeks to represent children’s fancy as a destructive

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<sup>20</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 193.

<sup>21</sup> Nesbit, *Story of the Treasure Seekers*, 19.

force and whose influence thwarts the agency of imagination. This destructive voice appears in the characters of the vicious parent and Jimmy (the adult-ventriloquizing child), in each work respectively. In *Wings and the Child*, Nesbit explains the manner in which a young girl who dresses in her obliging aunt's old clothes meets with her mother's admonishment when she pretends to be a princess. The aunt occupies the space of the fairy godmother with her gift of clothing, and the servants, too, show more kindness and intuition than the girl's own parent. Cruelly, the mother mocks her previously enchanted daughter, stating that she is "Princess Rag-Bag, more like," and her child—robbed of this fantasy—collapses into tears.<sup>22</sup> The mother falls into the trope of the fairy-tale maternal figure, one that, instead of nurturing, destroys. Once her mother rejects her fantasy, the girl is forced to exchange a narrative of transformation and empowerment for one of unrelenting ridicule.

This poignant example of a young girl's frustrated attempt to transcend her mother's restrictive world and enter into the make-believe realm is an indirect allusion to a significant episode in *The Enchanted Castle*. Toward the end of the first chapter, the siblings discover Mabel lying on her back, wearing a long pink tulle gown, and pretending to be an "enchanted princess." Jimmy, however, is highly skeptical: "you aren't really a Princess, are you?"<sup>23</sup> By depicting Jimmy as the unbelieving skeptic and, by extension, the potential adult figure who rejects imaginative play, Nesbit draws attention in *The Enchanted Castle* to what became the leading point in *Wings and the Child*. Jimmy and the mother of "Princess Rag-Bag" illustrate Nesbit's recognition that adult voices are problematic for children. Jimmy's language represents the intrusion of the adult voice into the world of childhood, thereby disrupting child autonomy.

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<sup>22</sup> Nesbit, *Wings and the Child*, 80.

<sup>23</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 23.

The grownup's voice functions as a repudiation of the world in which children may, though narrative reworking, explore their own ideas and anxieties outside the scope of adult control. Furthermore, Nesbit's narrator assumes the position of advocate for the child. Mabel's fairy tale magic does eventually literalize itself, not only for the children, but also the peripheral adults. The grown-ups hover on the edge of the story, but are never allowed to fully intrude upon or overshadow the experiences of the children.

On the one occasion when an adult takes the magic ring without the children's consent, the boarding house maid finds that the ring works disastrously against her. The siblings and Mabel consider carefully both when and to whom access to magic may be granted. Though adult-driven popular genre fiction may threaten to excise the children from their frameworks, the narrator of *The Enchanted Castle* centers on childhood experience, allowing Gerald and Mabel, in particular, to voice their frustrations and concerns about their expulsion or erasure from certain genres. By concentrating on the ways in which the children navigate their relationships, the novel also encourages the child reader to encounter and condemn such an erasure. Thus, the child has a right as a voice of moral authority, action, and censure. These roles, in Nesbit's universe, do not and cannot belong to adults alone.

Mabel's self-constructed fairy tale evinces two instructive points that connect *The Enchanted Castle* with *Wings of the Child*. First, it reveals that the children's participation in Mabel's fairy tale builds a communal trust and sociability that extends beyond their class differences (Mabel as the niece of a housekeeper and the three siblings being the public school children of middle-class parents). Secondly, the creativity and playfulness of Mabel, Gerald, and Kathleen shows that these children can indeed learn to "live for one's country" and thus become agents of political change. Imaginative play allows them to explore, and, significantly, to



challenge and diverge from traditional literary narratives, particularly the standard plot of romantic fairy tale. More to the point, the idea of “[living] for one’s country” through such creative inventiveness embodies the heart of Nesbit’s Fabian politics: the fundamental belief that the democratic transformation of society must be enacted through imaginative reform, rather than violent revolution. Just as Nesbit’s *Wings and the Child* attempts to reform attitudes toward childhood play and elementary education, *The Enchanted Castle*, particularly in its first chapter, deliberately posits children as empowered narrators who are capable of sophisticated and transformative interpretations of conventional literary genres. Concurrently, Nesbit uses the novel to engage in an extended study of how children adopt adult language, book consumption, and canonical literature. At its core, *The Enchanted Castle* celebrates the story of four child protagonists who learn through play how to reread and reconstruct a mutable world unrestricted either by empirical facts or moralistic rigidity.

### **Generic Troubles: From Struggle to Adaptation**

In the sections that follow, I focus on the manner in which Nesbit subverts the expectations associated with specific popular genres of adult fiction and considers how children, when able to exercise considerable autonomy, use literary narrative as a compelling means of reshaping their experiences. By transforming narrative to reflect their own interests, the child protagonists become empowered authors and critical readers in their own right. At the very onset of the novel, the narrator opens with a brief mention of the children at school, but just as quickly the impossibility of *The Enchanted Castle* turning into a boarding-school narrative also becomes apparent. Here Nesbit’s narrative voice clearly suggests that gender segregation is an inadequate

model of education that will be superannuated in the future, “because the sensible habit of having boys and girls at the same school is not yet as common as I hope it will be some day.”<sup>24</sup> Although Nesbit’s narrator suggests that the gender-segregation is the only (and insufficient) model for education, Nesbit herself certainly would have been aware of co-educational Bedales School, which the children of several notable Fabians attended. Since that kind of co-educational experience was uncommon at the time the novel is obligated to address the dominant boarding-school experience—that of single-sex education. Significantly, the children choose to spend their holiday at the boarding school when their other option is the house of an elderly woman. Such a place, the narrator suggests, would further prevent the children from being the protagonists of their imaginative world: “it was one of those houses where it is impossible to play. You know the kind of house, don't you? There is a sort of a something about that kind of house that makes you hardly able even to talk to each other when you are left alone, and playing seems unnatural and affected.”<sup>25</sup>

The novel crucially underscores the children's need for and choice of a space in which they can exercise imaginative power outside frameworks that adults have attempted to circumscribe. The children must extend their literal and figurative horizons beyond the school and nursery room to new places where adventure must follow the inevitable clashes of gender, class, crime, and magic. In the boarding school, however, they need to negotiate with one another how and what they will play. One of the earliest points of conflict between Gerald, Kathleen, and Jimmy occurs in the first chapter when they briefly toy with the idea of asserting their own authorship and writing a book. The suggestion, made by Kathleen, meets with Jimmy’s

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<sup>24</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 1.

derision and Gerald's rejection. "If we wrote a book,' Kathleen persisted, 'about what the insides of schools really *are* like, people would read it and say how clever we were.'"<sup>26</sup>

Kathleen's argument centers on her assertion that such a story has a place in the fiction marketplace because the current boarding-school novel does not accurately represent the child's experience. By making such a claim, Kathleen immediately upends the supposed verisimilitude of a dominant popular genre marketed toward the girl reader. The narrator neither negates nor contradicts Kathleen's statement, reinforcing her right to reject authoritatively the genre as a misrepresentation. Gerald affirms his sister's critique by countering that if they were to dare to write a representative account of boarding school life, adults would "most likely expel us."<sup>27</sup> The children signal their recognition that a genre marketed toward them does not, in fact, represent them. Instead, Gerald's observation highlights the divorce between the experience of childhood and adult imaginings, and perhaps invasion, of that space.

Though opening with an attack on the limited world of the boarding-school novel, the story transparently invests itself in decrying how popular genres of fiction have become modes of gender segregation imposed on children. When the brothers reject Kathleen's idea for writing a boarding-school novel, Gerald offers an alternative: outdoors adventure games. Kathleen's knowledge of girls' boarding-school novels excludes her brothers, while Gerald's consumption of boys' adventure stories has excluded Kathleen. Gerald's reading has taught him to imagine himself as a detective penetrating the underworld or as an adventurer on the South Seas. His imaginative space exists outside the house, in the public sphere, or the larger scope of Empire. Kathleen's reading, however, has trapped her within English domestic spaces. Gerald, as the

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<sup>26</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 3.

oldest, insists on adventuring, but this choice carries them onto the castle grounds where they chance upon the seemingly enchanted Mabel. For Gerald and Kathleen, the fairy tale or, more broadly, the world of magic, allows them to find a common narrative in which they both long to participate. Gerald's own enchantment mirrors Kathleen's upon seeing childhood fairy stories come to life on the castle grounds: "I've always felt something magic would happen some day, and now it has."<sup>28</sup> However, just as magic provides the children with a script, that same script mandates strict gender roles. If Mabel is the princess, only a prince can wake her with a kiss. Initially, the children embrace generic convention. Mabel remains unmoving when Kathleen kisses her, yet she willingly performs her awakening when Jimmy kisses her on the cheek. The children's own insistence on adhering to the strict roles allocated them by popular fiction genres, however, becomes a source of ongoing conflict and increasing criticism during the novel. The narrator shows how children, having internalized these rigid identities, whether gendered or reserved for adults, must find ways to negotiate or operate outside them.

*The Enchanted Castle* does not merely refuse to accept these roles, but also shows how the child protagonists have the ability and right to consider and reject generic convention. When Mabel finds herself rendered invisible by a magic ring, she weighs her options with the other children:

"You'll have to tell your aunt," said Kathleen kindly.

"No, no, no!" moaned Mabel invisibly; "take me with you. I'll leave her a note to say I've run away to sea."

"Girls don't run away to sea."

"They might," said the stone floor between the pillars, "as stowaways, if

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<sup>28</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 19.

nobody wanted a cabin boy—cabin girl, I mean.”

“I’m sure you oughtn’t,” said Kathleen firmly.

“Well, what *am* I to do?”<sup>29</sup>

In attempting to replicate the adventure novel, Mabel finds that she, or someone like her, is just as invisible as she is while wearing the magic ring. Kathleen acts as the enforcer of these gender roles, showing Nesbit’s deft awareness that patriarchal restrictions on girls are as often propagated by other girls, rather than boys. Mabel does not encounter this resistance passively, however. When Mabel must leave a letter for her aunt in order to account for absence, she finds a way into the sea adventure by writing that a lady in a motor car has adopted her and that, together, they will go to sea.<sup>30</sup> Faced with her negation in the male-dominated seafarer’s tale, Mabel imaginatively builds the fiction of a woman who will support her adventures. In Mabel’s rewriting, girls and women can and do go to sea. This is not to say that Kathleen becomes the novel’s scapegoat for restricting Mabel’s imagination. While Mabel’s friendship with Gerald dominates the book, the narrator draws attention to quiet but important moments of sororal bonding. On the night of her invisibility, Mabel stays over in Kathleen’s room: “All this magic had been rather upsetting, and she was just the least bit frightened, but in the dark she found it was not so bad. Mabel’s arms went round her neck the moment she got into bed, and the two little girls kissed in the kind darkness, where the visible and the invisible could meet on equal terms.”<sup>31</sup> Nesbit’s narrator signals that the two girls, with their divergent narratives, learn how to share space. Certainly, Kathleen, since she is anxious to please her brothers, lays out more

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<sup>29</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 48.

<sup>30</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 50.

<sup>31</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 53.

conservative narrative frameworks. But Mabel, with Kathleen's support, routinely seeks to build her own narrative models that allow her a more expansive female role as an active protagonist.

*The Enchanted Castle* examines how not just children, but also crucially girls, find themselves forced to bend, mold, and adapt male-dominated spaces—both real and imagined—in order to have narrative freedom. Significantly, it is Kathleen who initially reinforces traditional gender roles and mandates that Mabel remain within narrative convention. The middle class girl reinforces more traditional modes of girlhood while the working class Mabel dares to radically revise them. Kathleen, throughout the novel, struggles to imagine her way out of a more traditional female role while Mabel frequently revisits and rejects her invisibility in person and in print. Toward the end of *The Enchanted Castle*, the two girls have a back-and-forth exchange about wanting to avoid the fate of the “old maid” and marry. Yet their views of marriage differ extraordinarily. As they project possible marriage plots that they might inhabit, Kathleen posits herself as a wife to a gypsy king or a sailor. In the first scenario, she imagines herself as a traveling with him in a caravan: a domestic space altered only in its mobility. In the second narrative she conjures, Kathleen becomes the sailor's widow, keeping a daily, isolated vigil at her husband's graveside. She inhabits stories that inscribe a sequestered female passivity. Mabel, by comparison, imagines herself to be the wife of a brigand, undermining his work by freeing his captives, or as a soldier so that she might “go to the wars with short petticoats and a cocked hat and a barrel round [my] neck like a St. Bernard dog.”<sup>32</sup> Mabel's stories thus place her directly in the center of the action as a force for change and adventure. Importantly, however, the narrator steps back from commentary to allow Mabel and Kathleen to exchange ideas freely—Mabel suggesting several times in the novel that she will become a writer and Kathleen

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<sup>32</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 258.

espousing a more traditional domestic role. In Nesbit's work, there is space for both girls' imagined adulthoods.

The novel also, though, interrogates the boys' visions of marriage and how the romance narrative challenges and threatens the adventure genre's idealization of male independence. Gerald, in sharp contrast to Mabel's vision, jumps into the marriage conversation by claiming that his wife will be "a dumb girl, or else get the ring to make her so that she can't speak unless she's spoken to."<sup>33</sup> Gerald's appalling narration precedes his real fantasy adulthood in which he remains the lone hero, a stoic outsider. If he is to have a wife, the only purpose magic could have would be to silence her. Gerald implicitly understands that the adventure genre and the domestic romance do not harmonize happily. While the tone of Gerald's declaration does not imply that he has any serious intent, the possibility that magic may be used to enact violence or enforce silence on women remains a threat. It is worth noting that Mabel's invisibility happens without intent or consent, whereas Gerald chooses to wear the ring and render himself invisible. While Gerald directs more narration than the other children on the topic of marriage, the novel gives Mabel the final word on this matter: "'I think I'll marry a dumb husband,' said Mabel, 'and there shan't be any heroes in my books when I write them, only a heroine. Come on, Cathy.'"<sup>34</sup> At this moment, Mabel takes on her own authority, recognizing and asserting her right to excise or remodel men to fit her own narrative just as has been done to her. She becomes the new model for authorship not because she will write or narrate such misandrous stories, but because she realizes that she has the power to shape male characters and roles as much as male storytellers. Not only that, authorship also promises a road to economic independence. Although

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<sup>33</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 259.

<sup>34</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 259.

Mabel and Kathleen have diverging narratives of marriage and female behavior, after Gerald's offensive remarks they significantly leave together, demonstrating a sororal bond that counters a boy's vision of his masculine independence.

Girls, as *The Enchanted Castle* shows, may need to work hard to carve out a narrative space for themselves but, Nesbit's narrator makes clear, Gerald similarly finds that trying to live by the tropes of detective fiction leaves him mired in moral complexities for which the genre has failed to prepare him. Gerald, during his adventures, repeatedly invokes the names of Sherlock Holmes and Monsieur LeCoq, fantasizing about how he, too, might act like Conan Doyle's and Émile Gaboriau's popular heroes of detective fiction. His reading marks not only his personal proclivities, but reflects his perception of a relationship between independence and a performance of masculinity. In her essay on girlhood during the fin de siècle, Carol Dyhouse notes: "definitions of gender—notions about what constituted 'masculinity' and 'femininity'—where intimately bound up with this relation of dependency."<sup>35</sup> Whereas Kathleen adheres to this definition and Mabel seeks ways into a narrative of female independence, Gerald assumes the mantle of independence as a generic right. When he stumbles upon a real theft, he realizes that he has the opportunity to enact his imagined detective narrative. Thwarting the criminals by alerting Johnson, the local policeman, to the location of the stolen goods, Gerald feels that finally he has joined the ranks of the detecting elite, only to discover that the paper does not mention him or the other children. When he goes to collect the local paper, the *Liddlesby Observer*, he and his peers find that Johnson has received the designation of hero and that the children remain unacknowledged: "It was Gerald who went out after breakfast to buy the newspaper, and who read aloud to the other the two columns of fiction which were the *Liddlesby Observer's* report of

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<sup>35</sup> Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1981), 143.



the facts.”<sup>36</sup> Gerald and the others find themselves excised from the written, public record. The detective stories that feature Holmes and LeCoq therefore do not provide a place for child heroism, and, though Gerald may want to identify himself with this popular tradition, the general readership of Liddlesby certainly does not. Adults read children as dependents. Therefore, the novel implies, Gerald may not yet assume the privileges of masculine independence. Yet, for all of his desire to be one of the detectives he idolizes, Gerald, by participating in the genre, eventually realizes that the realities of crime and punishment, too, are elided. After the treasure has been discovered and the criminals have escaped, Gerald makes a confession to Mabel: “I couldn’t help it,’ he said, ‘I know you’ll think I’m a criminal but I couldn’t do it. I don’t how detectives can. I went over a prison once, with father; and after I’d given the tip to Johnson I remembered that, and I just couldn’t. I know I’m a beast, and not worthy to be a British citizen.”<sup>37</sup> Even though Gerald may declare himself a failure, his willingness to rewrite the narrative—his feeling that he has no other recourse—suggests that he does, as Nesbit states in *Wings and the Child*, “live for one’s country.”

Through Gerald, the novel openly explores how genre might serve to reinforce political inequalities if accepted unexamined. Gerald’s self-reproach roots itself in a polluted sense of citizenship: he finally recognizes that to perform his obligations to the detective story, he must adhere to its simplistic glossing of the consequences of criminal investigation and the realities of the English penal system. Acknowledging that he cannot participate in this manner marks Gerald’s ability to break with a trope central to this popular genre, even as it produces anxiety for him. More broadly, all of the child characters of *The Enchanted Castle* must confront these

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<sup>36</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 120.

<sup>37</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 130.

legacies of generic popular fiction and determine how to break from or rewrite them into narratives that reflect a world of much greater moral complexity. Just as Mabel cannot reconcile herself to a more traditional role of the domestic or land-bound woman, Gerald cannot participate in a justice system that he himself knows to be unjust. Much to his disappointment, Gerald recounts that the newspaper declared that the robbers “must have received warning from a confederate.”<sup>38</sup> Instead of emerging in the press as the hero, Gerald finds himself grouped with the thieves. Finally written into the detective story, his role has been warped into that of the criminal antagonist. His confession to Mabel allows her to make the final pronouncement and she decides that Gerald has done something kind, rather than criminal. Nesbit’s novel thus does not simplify moral situations for its child protagonists but grounds their choices in a complicated moral landscape. For Gerald, the detective story reveals itself as a genre rooted in a fantasy of its own—one of black-and-white morality devoid of the nuance that colors Gerald’s experience. Gerald will never be a Sherlock Holmes, but Nesbit’s story portrays this recognition as heroic.

Gerald may not have arrived at a decisively socialist solution as much as acted on a socialist impulse, but his friendship with Mabel—the only one of the children in whom he confides about his supposed moral failing in aiding the thief’s escape—embraces a socialist promise of their intellectual equality and camaraderie. In his essay on *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *The Railway Children*, Christopher Parkes notes: “In Nesbit’s novels, when the middle-class family’s position is threatened, its children are in danger of becoming mixed up with and mistaken for criminal subjects [...] Child’s play ensures that while they are involved in the commercial world—the all-to-realistic world in which adults must struggle to earn a living—

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<sup>38</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 129.

they remain uncorrupted.”<sup>39</sup> In *The Enchanted Castle*, however, the middle-class child chooses to become “mixed up” with criminals because Gerald can intellectually reason that a middle-class institution of justice does not act in a way that Gerald recognizes as just. Moreover, Mabel, a working class child, acts as a moral sounding board for Gerald, confirming these socialist impulses that noticeably divide Gerald from middle-class morality that would deliver the thieves into the prison system. The novel does not seek to critique middle-class morals as much as it works to legitimize the capability of children to act as literary critics and reformists. In the end, Mabel and Gerald respect each other as authors of their own universes.

### **From Subversion to Experimentation**

Though children may be authors of their own universes, the novel also engages in a sustained examination of the protagonists’ interaction with popular and traditional literature to assert the sophistication of child readers. Gerald, Kathleen, Jimmy, and Mabel are the children that read Scott and Doyle. *The Enchanted Castle* stakes its claims by considering the ways in which children use literary tropes and references to understand and negotiate their experiences. When trying to calm Kathleen with the promise of a quiet afternoon, Gerald promises her, “apples, and 'Robinson Crusoe' or the 'Swiss Family,' or any book you like that's got no magic in it.”<sup>40</sup> Gerald, having found that the magic they encounter has begun to move outside their control, falls back on adventure stories that seem, by comparison to the fairy tale, more reliable genres. Adventures of shipwreck, such as the isolationist *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), appear, but

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<sup>39</sup> Christopher Parkes, *Children's Literature and Capitalism: Fictions of Social Mobility in Britain, 1850-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 102.

<sup>40</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 183.

the familial survival tale of *Swiss Family Robinson* (1812) provides a counter-narrative to Defoe's tale of the lone hero (until, of course, Friday's arrival). While I have already discussed the fairy tale and detective fiction, numerous other genres and specific literary quotations and phrases appear throughout the novel, all of which meet with varying degrees of celebration or disdain, both from the child characters and Nesbit's highly critical narrator. I would like to suggest further that this linguistic experimentation leads into a narrative experimentation that becomes proto-modernist. Moreover, this experimentation evolves into a commentary for how genres are simultaneously coming under increased scrutiny from clever child readers but also, by extension, revealing a new degree of instability in form.

By taking a page from Shakespeare, Nesbit's narrator first recognizes how vocabulary may be imbued with meaning by a child who encounters words without sufficient context. The novel explores how children, when using puns, exploit homophonic phrases to imbue them with accurate, albeit unintentional, meaning. Frequently, the narrative voice exposes the ways in which children adopt adult lexicons without fully grasping the terminology. Nonetheless, the children construct meaning in a complex manner. When, for example, Mademoiselle expresses interest in the estate of Lord Yalding, Mabel informs the Frenchwoman that the estate is "in tale."<sup>41</sup> The word entail evades Mabel, but the estate truly is "in tale" throughout its many magical permutations. This linguistic metamorphosis of the estate from "entail" to "in tale" allows Mabel to rework the narrative from Austenian marriage dilemma to the fairy tale, a genre that is much more readily within Mabel's scope.

Mabel and the other children not only assimilate language, but also interpret adults through the books they witness grownups reading, thus building upon an established tradition of

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<sup>41</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 125.

the novel as a type of transformative consumption. The three siblings find Mademoiselle “reading a yellow-covered book.”<sup>42</sup> Nesbit, a regular contributor to Henry Harland’s *Yellow Book* which, as noted previously, took its name from the scandalous yellow-backs associated with sleazy French fiction, introduces the reader to Mademoiselle through her book, whose contents cannot help but evoke socialism, sensationalism, and certainly the infamous Oscar Wilde trial of 1895: “It was a very sleek boy, brown and thin and interesting-looking, that knocked at the door of the parlour where Mademoiselle sat reading a yellow-covered book and wishing vain wishes.”<sup>43</sup> Mademoiselle also represents the children’s freedom, as it is she who gives them permission to play freely, without which they can neither exercise their autonomy nor encounter the castle and Mabel. Mademoiselle and her “yellow-covered” book present an oppositional force in the same paragraph to the ridiculed Little Lord Fauntleroy. When the scandalous yellow book imaginings meet the foppish Fauntleroy, the two cancel each other and leave both participants consciously laughing at their own constructions. By contrast, Mabel’s aunt, represented as largely negligent, consumes pink-covered romances: “The aunt was discovered reading a pink novelette at the window of the housekeeper’s room, which, framed in clematis and green creepers, looked out on a nice little courtyard to which Mabel led the party.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 4. The reference to the scandalous associations with yellow books also makes its way into *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*. Oswald comments on the politics of bookselling, which does not favor the seller, and the color’s association with low culture: “Of course we have read Mr. Sherlock Holmes, as well as the yellow-covered books with pictures outside that are so badly printed and you get them for fourpence halfpenny at the bookstall when the corners of them are beginning to curl and get dirty, with people looking to see how the story ends when they are waiting for trains. I think this is most unfair to the boy at the bookstall” (Nesbit, *Story of the Treasure Seekers*, 31).

<sup>44</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 58.

Whereas the effect on Mabel is endearing, the charm does not extend, the narrator implies, to an adult woman who loses herself in romantic fancies, as well as the *Home Drivel* magazine, whose title is of course parodic.

The adults of *The Enchanted Castle* operate perilously close to caricature, but this draws greater attention to the highly innovative and sophisticated ways in which the children of the novel populate their speech. It is the child protagonists who allude with greatest frequency to canonical as well as popular literature. Gerald, for instance, quotes John Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (1819) in reference to the trouble Mabel might bring upon them: "'Only he has an inside feeling that this Mabel of yours is going to get us into trouble,' put in Gerald. 'Like La Belle Dame Sans Merci, and he does not want to be found in future ages alone and palely loitering in the middle of sedge and things.'"<sup>45</sup> Gerald innately understands his brother Jimmy's suspicions of Mabel to be tied in to gender, as his allusion suggest. Mabel, though, shows herself just as capable of returning reassurance through allusion and responds by declaring that she and the siblings comprise a "band of brothers," paralleling their alliance to that of the soldiers in the Saint Crispin's Day speech from William Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1599). Mabel deliberately chooses a speech that unites the children and allays Jimmy's fears and subverts Gerald's allusion, linking them all through a metaphor of masculine bonding. Later, Gerald appropriates Robert Herrick's "Cherry Ripe" (1647), but his rewording also invokes Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862) and the latter's suspicions of the marketplace. The children encounter magical objects and secret passageways because E. F. Benson's *Luck of the Vails* (1901) initially aroused Mabel's curiosity, leading her to discover the castle's secrets. In a direct reference to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Mabel at one point wishes that she were

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<sup>45</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 62.

twelve feet tall, only to have her body stretch and morph accordingly. While the scene focuses on the comic, rather than horrific, potential, the extreme and uncontrolled transformation of Mabel's body calls to mind some of the more frequent feminist critiques of Carroll's first *Alice* story. In Carroll's novel, Alice's body periodically grows and shrinks rapidly, leaving the heroine sometimes disoriented, occasionally trapped, and undeniably vulnerable. Nesbit's narrative, however, diverges dramatically from a tale about the uncontrollable metamorphosis of a girl's body. To counter a tale of female isolation, Mabel has the support of Gerald, Kathleen, and Jimmy, while she waits until dark to revert to her original form. Carroll's Alice famously asserts: "I've a right to think."<sup>46</sup> By comparison, Nesbit's children have a right to think and to revise. The children articulate their experiences and social bonds through these wide-ranging works of poetry, fiction, and drama.

Though adults in the popular fiction work of the *Strand* interact with children that express simple desires and interests, children and adults alike in Nesbit's work have complicated interests and narratives that exist independently of one another. Each character, the narrator of *The Enchanted Castle* suggests, has the right to an autonomous imaginative life. No story must be subjugated to the narrative of another. When Mabel and the siblings have dinner at Kathleen's boarding school, Mademoiselle hears that Mabel lives at Yalding Towers and quickly draws Mabel out to discover what has happened to Lord Yalding, Mademoiselle's former lover. Mabel cannot immediately recognize Mademoiselle as the heroine of romance because she has imagined Lord Yalding's former lover (whom Mabel does not know to be Mademoiselle) as part of a Gothic novel and reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Telltale Heart" (1843). The thoroughly modern Mabel delights in the most horrific elements of the Gothic as she recounts

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<sup>46</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865; repr., New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2013), 70.

assumes the imprisonment and possible death of Lord Yalding's lover:

“The lady went into a convent; I expect she's bricked-up alive by now.”

“Bricked—?”

“In a wall, you know,” said Mabel, pointing explainingly at the pink and gilt roses of the wallpaper, “shut up to kill them. That's what they do to you in convents.”<sup>47</sup>

Mabel continues to explain what she imagines to be the fate of the tragic lover. After finishing her story, Mabel confidently announces “I got that out of a book.”<sup>48</sup> Mademoiselle does not live out the Gothic tale, but the children understand that she, like them, might have desires or needs that extend beyond her role as an instructor. The novel does not shy away from the reality that a woman of education and talent might not enjoy working in a school with children.

Mademoiselle laments: “To what good to have the talent, when one must pass one's life at teaching the infants?”<sup>49</sup> Mabel and the siblings learn that the French governess has desires that exist outside their own needs and desires. Just as Mabel and Gerald seek out ways to shape their own narrative journeys, they recognize and respond to the same impulse in Mademoiselle. When the teacher learns that Lord Yalding has not married, she indulges the children with cakes purchased with her own salary. Gerald remarks: “I call this jolly decent of her. You know, governesses never have more than the meanest pittance, just enough to sustain life, and here she is spending her little all on us.”<sup>50</sup> The economic politics of England's educators shifts suddenly

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<sup>47</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 126.

<sup>48</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 127.

<sup>49</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 124.

<sup>50</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 166.



to the forefront. Mabel, Gerald, Kathleen, and Jimmy may not lead lives of deprivation, but they do not and cannot live unaffected or ignorant of the social conditions surrounding them.

The novel's children know that they can read the castle in a way that the visitors cannot and this knowledge parallels them with the novel's readers, who share this insight. Only if and when the children choose to share their magic with adults can those adults participate in the magic world. In the penultimate chapter, the children watch as visitors appear at Yalding Towers: "It was show-day at Yalding Castle, and it seemed good to the children to go and visit Mabel, and, as Gerald put it, to mingle unsuspected with the crowd; to gloat over all the things which they knew and which the crowd didn't know about the castle and the sliding panels, the magic ring and the statues that came alive."<sup>51</sup> The children invite Mademoiselle and Lord Yalding into the enchanted world of the ring and the castle and that is part of the enchantment—since the children choose who may or may not have access rather than the adults. They become the narrators that determine what may or may not be shared with their audience. However, they also must confront the horror and danger of authorship, as they discover to their terror. When the children put on a play of "Beauty and the Beast," they construct audience members out of spare household materials: "Their bodies were bolsters and rolled-up blankets, their spines were broom-handles, and their arm and leg bones were hockey sticks and umbrellas."<sup>52</sup> Soon after, the audience members take on a horrifying vivacity as the paper-faced Ugly-Wuglies come to life. Mabel, Gerald, Kathleen, and Jimmy watch, terrified, as they learn that authors cannot always control or mediate their own creations. The Ugly-Wuglies, like many characters, operate separately of Nesbit's intent, which was to create creatures that scared, instead of their final

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<sup>51</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 253.

<sup>52</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 138.

appearance as disturbed nightmares that suit the horror genre better than that of fantasy. Briggs has noted the striking wildness of the narrative, which from her perspective departs further from convention than any of Nesbit's previous works.<sup>53</sup> If we read the novel as an extended advocacy for the child's right to autonomous play and critical authority, the chaotic Ugly-Wuglies represent its concurrent perils. For children to empower themselves as narrators, they must confront the possibility that their own creations will start to move outside their authorial intent. It is not accidental that at this moment, the novel strategically begins to experiment with narrative form. This jolt and shift in style links Nesbit more explicitly with Modernist experimentation that accounts for the dissatisfaction Briggs identifies.

Breaking down the very conventions of her own novel, Nesbit at this point breaks with strict form and destabilizes the idea of narrative as a static or predetermined form. In a sudden break from the past-tense narration of the novel in chapter ten, the story shifts into present tense at the local train station. Gerald watches as one of the Ugly-Wuglies boards a train to London accompanied by an elderly enchanted Jimmy. The shift occurs at a train station, which itself operates as a place of transport and momentum that removes the three characters from their village world to the rough and financially brutal world of London. By relating the scene in present tense, the narrator replicates the feeling of the train moving and the chaos of the station. Furthermore, the present tense emphasizes the simultaneity of both scientific advancement, as represented by the train, and magic spells:

“I don't understand,” says Gerald, alone in his third-class carriage, “how railway trains and magic *can* go on at the same time.”

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<sup>53</sup> Briggs, *A Woman of Passion*, 263-64.

And yet they do.<sup>54</sup>

Gerald begins to understand that he can control narrative time by shifting his present experience into the narration. On the train platform and as the train travels, Gerald occupies a moment of immediacy and the present. He has left a nostalgic and romanticized past to inhabit a world of technological momentum. The novel spirals away from its story of a rural enchanted castle as a magic ring, dinosaurs, Ugly-Wuglies, the statues of Greek gods, and more begin rapidly to collide.

Several critics have cited this episode as a sign that Nesbit lost control over her novel. Yet there is a different way of understanding this sudden shift in the narration. In order to substantiate its own work of undermining popular generic conventions, the novel, like its child narrators, must also break with the rules it has established for itself. While the magic and plot points become more rapid, the child protagonists gain confidence in their own narrative authority as they grasp that they themselves can control and shape the magic of the ring and their environment by thinking around the consequences of their own wishes. Just like electricity and carpets, trains and magic must be part of simultaneous movement and experience, just as many narratives may occur and overlap, but do not negate each other. When the novel winds to its close, the narrator cheekily reappears in full force, insisting on the story's veracity. For proof the narrator cites a newspaper headline referring the disappearance of a "Mr. U. W. Ugli," bizarre in that the novel already has discredited newspapers via the *Liddlesby Observer* as unreliable narratives. In the last line of the novel, the narrator directly challenges the reader to contest the narrator's authority, suggesting that the children themselves may not longer credit it: "It is all very well for all of them to pretend that the whole of this story is my own invention: facts are

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<sup>54</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 190-91.

facts, and you can't explain them away."<sup>55</sup> Yet the entire novel explains away fact after supposed fact, making the narrator's final claim one of self-parody. By crafting the ending with lingering ambiguity and toying with the possibility that the narrator has engaged in an extensive fiction (or rather, drawing the reader's attention to it), the novel places control in the child reader to act as the authority on whether the story may be real or wholly imagined, and thus cedes authority to her or him. The adult voice of the narrator is, ultimately, one that the child has the right to critique or dismiss. Children may accord legitimacy to the events of the novel or revoke the authority of the author through their authority as readers, setting in motion their larger right to shape a non-fictional in need of examination and reform.

*The Enchanted Castle* may never obtain the regard or popularity of Nesbit's *Treasure Seekers* or *The Railway Children*, but it takes shape as one of Nesbit's most important engagements with the child as protagonist and intellectual reader. Through the discrediting of journalism, the moral critique of the detective story, the metamorphosis of the fairy tale and other divergences from popular fiction genres, Nesbit builds a world that the child reader may access and then criticize. Difficult choices for Gerald not only permit but also encourage the child reader to recognize that she or he has the right and the need to engage with moral complexities rarely represented in the children's literature of Nesbit's contemporaries. Her visionary work on the right of the child to use fantasy as a conduit for grasping complicated scientific theorems offers an alternative paradigm to more static, traditional models of education. As narrative authorities, the child protagonists learn to use storytelling as a way of building their own spaces into the genres that do not currently allow a place for them. Mabel may be the niece of a housekeeper, but that does not prevent her from acting as Gerald's equal and confidant as

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<sup>55</sup> Nesbit, *The Enchanted Castle*, 297.

the two find themselves struggling to reconcile their moral impulses with conventional expectation. Gerald, in the written record, exists only as a criminal's "confidante," but he chooses this role rather than that of the detective. Kathleen may wish to live a plebian romance and Jimmy to embrace a wealthy life, but the novel reiterates the right of each to determine her or his own narrative destiny. Nesbit's work demands that narrative make space for modern child, or the modern child will make a space for herself. But, what happens when the child trying to make a space for himself begins highly marginalized? In the next section, I examine what happens between the 1908 publication of *The Enchanted Castle* as the eugenics movement gained speed in England and Nesbit's time-slip novel, *Harding's Luck*, which shifts the outlook from a middle-class perspective to that of a child who, in his transitions from disabled slum-child to historical aristocrat, starts to recognize and recoil from his own marginalization.

### **"The Little Cripple from Deptford": Nesbit's Fabian Politics and the Disabled Child**

Fabian Society founder and activist Sidney Webb wrote many tracts on social patterns and conditions throughout his career, but in 1907 he turned his attention to the falling birth rate in England: "To the present writer it seems that only by some such 'sharp turn' in our way of dealing with these problems can we avoid degeneration of type—that is race deterioration, if not race suicide."<sup>56</sup> In 1908, the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded released a formal document in which they included a statement from the Association for

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<sup>56</sup> Sidney Webb, *The Decline in the Birth Rate* (London: Fabian Society, 1907), 19.

Promoting Employment of the Mentally or Physically Defective.<sup>57</sup> The Association, begun in 1901 and focusing its attentions on the most desperately impoverished neighborhoods of West London, as noted in the Commission's appendices, carefully segregates the disabled populace into three main categories: "families of low type," "families which have sunk to a low level morally or physically," and "families of the respectable working class."<sup>58</sup> The Association's work receives mention in Fabian materials and there are glancing references in A. R. Orage's socialist journal, the *New Age* (1907-1922). Everywhere, anxiety about shifting demographics and disabled workers plagued socialist publications. On the same page as an article celebrating the presence of Fabianism in Turkey, one socialist critic of the employment of the disabled writes with evident frustration:

In a letter to the "Times" this week the committee of the Association appeal for funds for the employment of the feeble-minded, the imbecile, the epileptic, the crippled, etc. We have, of course, no kind of objection whatever to the employment in some pleasant form of these unfortunates; but the irony of the situation is really rather oppressive. With 8 per cent of our skilled workers walking the streets idle, and their wives and families living God knows how on next to nothing, it does seem strange that so much fuss should be made about the employment of the unemployables.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Minutes of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1908), 237.

<sup>58</sup> *Minutes of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded*, 237.

<sup>59</sup> A. R. Orage, "Notes," *New Age* 3, no. 19 (1908): 363.

Read together, these documents reveal a plethora of troubling attitudes toward the mentally and physically disabled in Edwardian England. Human worth becomes intrinsically tied to the individual's facility to participate in the workforce and establishes a hierarchy in which the able-bodied are designated as the deserving. The remarks of the Association's general statement showcase the conflation of disability, morality, and class in a way that soon would become adopted with eager fanaticism by eugenicists on both sides of the Atlantic.

The *New Age* diatribe then sets up a secondary problem in its appropriation of well-worn political rhetoric that the undeserving take jobs from the deserving<sup>60</sup>—in this case the former being disabled persons and the latter the iconic working man so celebrated by all socialist movements, including Fabianism. The disabled become the thieves of work within a collectivist political movement rooted partially in an ideology of Utilitarianism advocated in the 1860s by John Stuart Mill. Serialized in *Fraser's Magazine*, Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1861) popularized his position as heir to the philosophical tradition that began with Jeremy Bentham and was sustained through Mill's father, James Mill. In his study of the history of disability within western culture, Herbert C. Covey writes: "The development of Utilitarianism as a philosophy and way of life influenced thinking regarding people with disabilities. To Utilitarians, the usefulness of something determines its value. Consequently, societies employing this philosophical viewpoint

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<sup>60</sup> The trope of those worthy to be employed pitted against those deemed unworthy is so well-worn by the eighteenth century that John Toland complains of the tiresome refrain in his 1714 treatise: "The vulgar, I confess, are seldom pleas'd in any country with the coming in of Foreners among 'em: which proceeds, first, from their ignorance, that at the beginning they were such themselves; secondly, from their grudging at more persons sharing the same trades or business with them, which they call *taking the bread out of their mouths*" (*Reasons for Naturalizing the Jews in Great Britain and Ireland, On the Same Foot with All Other Nations* [London: J. Roberts, 1714], 39).

judged people with disabilities as having diminished usefulness and hence social worth.”<sup>61</sup>

Whereas in Dickens’ *Christmas Carol* the disabled Tiny Tim exists to excite feelings of Christian charity in Ebenezer Scrooge and even values himself as a reminder of Christ’s miracles, Nesbit’s hero, Dickie, in *Harding’s Luck* understands that to most people he represents a burden of dependence upon and financial loss within the modern capitalist state.

*Harding’s Luck* appeared at a moment when England had a distressed fixation on the pervasive belief that forms of social and moral degeneracy were widespread. Fears about the corruption of the English population and public health drove the production of numerous scientific studies—some legitimate, others dubious—and a multiplicity of articles exhibiting various degrees of hysteria while trying anxiously to assign blame for what was assumed to be true: namely, that the English people were in state of advanced physical decline. Daniel Pick’s study of the history of degeneration in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe describes the famous report prepared by an investigative committee after widespread reporting that the efforts of the British in the Boer War had been undermined by a lack of healthy recruits:

The famous Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration (1904) is a case in point. Established in the wake of a scandal, much canvassed by journalists and politicians, over the apparently exceptionally poor physique of large numbers of potential recruits for the army during the Boer War, the Committee is usually seen as a kind of English empiricist refutation of degenerationism. Certainly it did refuse to adopt the word ‘degeneration’ in the report’s title and rejected the argument that the race as a whole was unfit or degenerate. The problem, they

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<sup>61</sup> Herbert C. Covey, *Social Perceptions of People with Disabilities in History* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1998), 38.



found, was not pervasive. It was bound geographically and socially to the poor of the slums, and the principle case of ‘deterioration’ was overcrowding.<sup>62</sup>

Social Darwinism here gives way to political exigencies—to claim widespread degeneration was to acknowledge a physical corruption within the state’s people. Notably, though the committee pays considerable attention to poverty and particularly its effects on children, the researchers ultimately direct only a few sentences toward “defective children,” declaring them outside the report’s purview: “Two other matters have been mentioned, viz.: vagrancy and the condition of defective children, and some evidence was given on the first named by Mr. Loch and ‘Colonel’ Lamb; but the Committee have not thought it necessary to consider them in this Report, as it is understood they are to be the subject of separate enquiries.”<sup>63</sup> The report proceeds to offer, among several solutions, one beloved by a many a Fabian—enforcing building regulations (to prevent the spread of slums) and the increase of green spaces so that “districts which hereafter become urbanized may have at least some of the attributes of an ideal garden city.”<sup>64</sup> *Harding’s Luck*, I suggest, undertakes what the Committee’s report does not: the novel refuses to separate Dickie’s body from national politics and instead deliberately entangles the two and finds its green spaces and ideal gardens in a vision of old England. Mill’s writings, including *Utilitarianism*, certainly had influence among Fabian thinkers, but Nesbit’s fiction shows a clear rupture between Mill’s idea of the child as a moldable figure (as mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation) and Nesbit’s portrayal of children as sophisticated, dynamic, and independent

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<sup>62</sup> Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 185.

<sup>63</sup> *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration* (London: Darling & Son, Ltd., 1904), 84.

<sup>64</sup> *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration*, 85.

thinkers. It is in this politically charged climate with its policing and pathologizing of the disabled body that Nesbit writes *Harding's Luck*.

Published two years after *The Enchanted Castle*, *Harding's Luck* narrates the adventures of Dickie: a physically disabled, hardscrabble boy living in a London slum. Dickie, after a series of adventures and unfortunate experiences, begins to slip back and forth in time between the Edwardian period and the Jacobean era. *Harding's Luck* thus has a superficially similar plot to its predecessor, *The House of Arden* (1908), in which siblings Eldred and Elfrida travel through different historical eras in their quest to restore their family estate in the twentieth century. When the brother and sister visit the Jacobean period in this time-slip tale, they meet their cousin, Richard Arden, later revealed to be fellow Edwardian Dickie Harding. In *Harding's Luck*, Dickie moves in from the margins to become the central character. Intellectually ambitious but often disregarded because of his lame foot, he struggles to find a stable place for himself when adult figures prove unreliable and the society around him devalues him for his disability. Through this critically neglected work of fiction, Nesbit reflects on urban poverty, juxtaposing the brutality of the slums and streets with an idealized, undeniably romantic view of England's early modern history. By having Dickie repeatedly visit a halcyon past in which he becomes able-bodied, Nesbit imagines English national promise while tentatively probing the dilemma of physical disability from within a socialist political organization increasingly fascinated by eugenics.

The pseudoscience surrounding the new obsession with heritable characteristics placed a strong emphasis on the defectiveness of children like Dickie, whose tough life in modern England forms the core of this highly political—but also highly contradictory—novel.

Nesbit's views on what constituted disability (a word that had broad latitude in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century) were fraught with tensions. Dickie Harding was not Nesbit's first disabled character. She had depicted a disabled protagonist before in her Gothic tale, "Uncle Abraham's Romance" (1893), in which the titular Abraham has become a social pariah because he has a lame leg. In this story, Abraham's lameness and loneliness are intertwined. He narrates his story claiming that he chose to spend his free hours in the churchyard because the seclusion meant that he did not have to endure the enchanting moments of others' romances when he would never have one of his own, but this choice removes him from circulation in the public sphere. "I remember, when I was a young man, I was very lonely indeed. I never had a sweetheart. I was always lame, my dear, from quite a boy; and the girls used to laugh at me."<sup>65</sup> Abraham ends up pursuing a romance with a woman whom he later discovers to have been a ghost. Throughout the story, he repeats the refrain that he was always lame and the girls laughed at him. His disability has annihilated the possibility that he will be taken seriously as a sexual adult. His only recourse, ultimately, is to take solace in his impossible romance. Nor was Nesbit anomalous in this tendency. Tamara S. Wagner notes the equating of lameness as a manifestation of emasculation in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859) as one example of the literary tradition.<sup>66</sup>

The socialist belief that disabled communities were a threat because their members might take jobs that should go first to able-bodied workers coincides with the striking distance Nesbit took from the suffrage movement and her adoption of similar models of argumentation when

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<sup>65</sup> E. Nesbit, *Grim Tales* (London: A. D. Innes & Co., 1893), 57.

<sup>66</sup> Tamara S. Wagner, "Ominous Signs or False Clues? Difference and Deformity in Wilkie Collins's Sensation Novels," in *Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature*, edited by Ruth Bienstock Anolik (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010), 54.

discussing women's place—or lack of place—in the workforce. In the same year that Nesbit published *Harding's Luck*, she also presented—by invitation—a lecture to the Fabian Women's Group. The lecture series topic was on the “Disabilities of Women as Workers” with the understanding that guest lecturers would argue against women as disabled bodies and instead make scientifically and socially sound claims to women's specific reproductive abilities. In her lecture on women as disabled workers Nesbit employs utilitarian language to discourage suffragism. In a sense, to discuss disability in the Edwardian era is, by extension, to discuss gender, almost inevitable when the word “disability” itself appeared in a variety of debates and discussions about enfranchisement from the Victorian period onward. For anti-suffrage activists, positing the female body as inherently disabled by sex was a key way of disenfranchising women by aligning them with the physically disabled, an extraordinarily marginalized group.

Interestingly for an author interested in the ability of disabled protagonist in *Harding's Luck*, Nesbit invokes disability in gender arguments in a very different way, as something inherently debilitating. The official summary of the series makes no mention of Nesbit or any speech. The only direct Fabian commentary appears years later in a vague comment. In the proof copy of the pamphlet, however, a record confirms that Nesbit spoke as the guest of honor and the copy recounts the full content of Nesbit's decrying the suffragist position that women are the able-bodied equals of male workers. She even suggests that women's suffrage is a destructive distraction from the socialist cause.<sup>67</sup> To the shock of all assembled, Nesbit clearly aligned herself with the anti-suffragist Fabians. In this copy, George Bernard Shaw has crossed out Nesbit's name and the entirety of her lecture summary. In his handwritten notes, he remarks that the final copy must omit any and all reference to Nesbit in order to avoid a scandal should a

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<sup>67</sup> George Bernard Shaw, ed., Corrected proof copy, *Summary of Seven Papers and Discussions upon the Disabilities of Women as Workers*, box E, folder 111, Fabian Society Papers.

printed copy move outside Fabian circulation and into the press. I want to suggest that in order to discuss disability in *Harding's Luck*, we must first look at how Nesbit moves away from the genre-bending and gender-progressive *Enchanted Castle* and within two years invests herself in a socialism that, in her view, should separate itself from women's suffrage. That such a reactionary shift is evident in her most Dickensian story—one that focuses on the modern industrial conditions that render Dickie lame—is, I will argue, no coincidence.

Typically, the Victorian disabled child characters most frequently invoked in scholarship are middle-class or aristocratic characters (I deliberately omit Tiny Tim, whom I discuss further on) whose disability or perceived disability involves an extreme degree of seclusion or confinement. Characters consistent with this model include Colin in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Secret Garden* (1910), Clara in Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* (1880), the willful Katy of *What Katy Did* (1872), and Eleanor H. Porter's eponymous *Pollyanna* (1913). This distinction between these popular characters in children's fiction and Dickie matters enormously because the likes of Colin, Heidi, and Katy belong to stories of self-healing through optimism, religious awakening, and, especially, an ameliorative connection with the natural world. Such characters do not live in or need to navigate urban landscapes. They do not—nor will they ever—find their value predicated upon their ability to contribute as workers. Utilitarian they are not. It is exactly on this question of utilitarianism that Nesbit first differentiates her protagonist, Dickie, who struggles for independence and work, from her other child characters while toying with the cult of sentiment surrounding disability. In *The House of Arden*, Richard, who will be revealed to be Dickie in *Harding's Luck*, is able-bodied as encountered by his time traveling cousins and only transformed into Dickie in the sequel novel. Briggs writes: “By the bold stroke of recasting Cousin Richard as a slum child, she could show him not only as a critic but as a victim of

modern times. The wretched plight of pauper children was all too evident, yet Edwardian London closed its eyes to the miseries at its own back door. Edith followed [John] Ruskin and [William] Morris in regarding such apathy as symptomatic of a wider social degeneration.”<sup>68</sup> Dickie, a member of the working class in modern times, finds that his society estimates his worth as a human citizen based upon his ability to produce. In her novel, Nesbit’s narrator works against the political rhetoric of utilitarianism and has Dickie prove his interest in and ability to develop a marketable skill. In her suppressed presentation to the Fabian Women’s Group, Nesbit insists that men, as superior bodies, should be entitled to work before women. Yet *Harding’s Luck* invests its politics in Dickie’s right to be the hero of his own story and his ability to operate independently. Yet it can only achieve that end by abstracting him from modern capitalist England and permitting him to travel back to a pre-industrial past in which he thrives as an able-bodied young man. In what follows, I explore this unresolved tension in Nesbit’s political thought and narrative practice by tracing the troubled and troubling meaning of disability in relation to her time-traveling boy protagonist.

*Harding’s Luck* could not make Dickie’s struggles to overcome the social prejudices and setbacks surrounding disability any plainer. For Dickie, finding a way to achieve economic independence and ultimately real agency directly correlates with his sense of self worth. In the modern age, he tries to encourage those around him to see beyond his disability, usually through his verbal assiduity and by presenting himself “with the dignity of the dream boy who was not a cripple.”<sup>69</sup> The narrator introduces Dickie before turning attention to the character’s lame foot. Yet the adult characters around him view continually him through the lens of disability and

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<sup>68</sup> Briggs, *Woman of Passion*, 288.

<sup>69</sup> Nesbit, *Harding’s Luck*, 115.

charity. No one offers to teach him a skill or trade. In his first long excursion into the past, however, Dickie meets a dockworker, Sebastian, who has sailed with Francis Drake and teaches Dickie how to carve. Able-bodied in the Jacobean period, Dickie finds that now those around him are willing to teach him marketable skills now that the assumption of Dickie's inability has disappeared. When Dickie returns the modern era, he finds that he can earn money carving wooden boxes, the skill he learned in the past. He articulates how this correlates with his sense of value as an English citizen: "Old Sebastian told me every one ought to do some duty to his country, or he wasn't worth his meat and ale. And you don't know how good it is having money that you've *earned yourself*."<sup>70</sup> To be sure, Nesbit's children, in all of her novels, seek to direct their own futures, but it is Dickie who wants to do so through taking on useful labor. This attitude reflects the influence of Utilitarianism on Fabian thought in particular and in Edwardian culture more pervasively.

In the above passage, *Harding's Luck* considers how Dickie has been denied a trade until in Jacobean times he learns carving: a skill that enables him in modern England to feel that he has social value. Certainly, when British politician John E. Gorst wrote his follow-up to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration's report, he employed the language of Utilitarianism: "The disablement of a child deprives the community of his future services, and imposes upon it the cost of his future maintenance."<sup>71</sup> Gorst deliberately chose his words in order to rouse the Edwardian public to action in his call for medical care and better nutrition for the

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<sup>70</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 132.

<sup>71</sup> John E. Gorst, "Physical Deterioration in Great Britain," *North American Review* 181 (July 1905): 9.

struggling and destitute of urban areas.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, his discussion of disability focused on the ways in which boys like Dickie became economic burdens, reducing them to passive sufferers and denying them any agency. Dickie, conversely, longs to have agency and economic independence. When Dickie wants to earn money to recover his sole possession, pawned by his caregiver, he struggles to find work for which anyone will hire him. He knows that he cannot gain employment as an errand boy as no one will hire a boy with a lame leg.<sup>73</sup> Thus, society first produces its own problem by the immediate dismissal of the disabled person as inherently valueless in a culture that commodifies human bodies.

Even as politicians and journalists led the hue and cry for reform, a contemporary of Nesbit's directed attention to the importance of the arts in the role of social change. Charles Masterman—member of the Christian Social Union and a Liberal Party M.P.—entered the fray with the publication of his work, *The Condition of England* (1909).<sup>74</sup> An admirer of H. G. Wells, Masterman refers in the aforementioned work to the Fabian Society as “the laboratory in which intellectual Socialism is matured.”<sup>75</sup> In his chapter “Literature and Progress,” Masterman

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<sup>72</sup> The Women's Local Government Society, as part of the Fabian Society, addressed published letters to Gorst in his role as Vice-President of the Committee of Council. One such letter emphasizes the importance of both women's education and their roles in civil government as they move forward into positions of local government, necessity for certain provisions to ensure women a fair chance of progress given historical prejudice. *Women's Local Government Society to John Gorst*, 1906, box E, folder 111, Fabian Society Papers.

<sup>73</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 11.

<sup>74</sup> Masterman also played a critical role in developing the terms of the National Insurance Bill, a piece of legislation that attracted the avid attention of the Fabian Women's Group. *Women's Local Government Society to John Gorst*, 1906, box E, folder 111, Fabian Society Papers.

<sup>75</sup> Not only does Masterman frequently and with enthusiasm invoke Wells as both a writer and political figure, but Masterman later would also recruit Wells to work with him in Wellington House, the British propaganda department, during World War I. H. C. G. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed 20 June 2014,



suggests that literature, on a whole, has fallen into a binary of which one side is represented by self-conscious writing with an emphasis on escapism (a category which Masterman writes includes psychological writers) and those that rail against escapism with confrontational work:

At the opposite pole are the apostles of protest—a Gorky, a Wells, a Mark Rutherford, who stab and slash at a life so remote from the ideal, in furious revolt against its complacencies and cruelties. Some fall back on dreams and memories, finding, either in a transfigured past or in the kingdom of fantasy which never was upon the solid ground, satisfaction denied in a world which has become “so unworthy.”<sup>76</sup>

Though Nesbit’s fellow Fabian Wells garners the attention in this excerpt, Masterman’s analysis places novels like *Harding’s Luck* firmly in a growing body of literature interested in a fictional, historic England able to mediate the suffering of the nation’s contemporary inhabitants and written by authors actively engaged in social reform. The past—albeit a heavily romanticized one—offered Nesbit a space to highlight the divisions and social problems of the modern English world, and the world is decidedly English, not British. In this respect, Nesbit follows the trend that Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew Humphries, scholars of Edwardian culture, trace in the vast majority of her contemporaries: “Edwardian fiction generally presents a particularly *English* rather than more widely British vision, even in the work of Scottish writers or British authors

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<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34927?docPos=1>. See also C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen & Co., 1909), 149.

<sup>76</sup> Masterman, *The Condition of England*, 233. Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) was a Russian author and socialist political activist with close ties to Lenin and Bolshevism. Mark Rutherford (1831-1913) was the pseudonym of William Hale White, a Nonconformist author.

living outside England.”<sup>77</sup> Nesbit, then, writes fiction that promotes exactly the social reform described by Masterman—one that explores the possibility of an ideal nationhood through the transfigured past and transfigured body.

Nesbit provides a fictional counter-narrative in which a child with a disability has intrinsic, albeit unrecognized, value that builds from character, not commerce. As such, *Harding’s Luck* radically suggests that although Dickie may only be able to legitimize himself to able-bodied Londoners through his acquiring of a revenue-generating craft, his own sense of worth is not tied to that skill until he recognizes the other ways in which Edwardian contemporaries and society disenfranchise him. In her work on disability in children’s literature, Lois Keith notes that by the early twentieth century the portrayal of a disabled protagonist overcoming her or his disability played a significant role in reinforcing the belief in the superiority of the normative body: “‘Overcoming’ stories, whether from fiction or life, have the important role of lessening the fear that disability holds for people. They assure the world that normal is right, to be desired and aspired to.”<sup>78</sup> Such is the power of the cult of normalcy that Dickie, in spite of hugely improved circumstances in the modern day, chooses nonetheless to return to the Jacobean era. The powerful argument underlying his choice, the novel suggests, is that Edwardian England first cripples Dickie and then punishes him for his disability. In utilitarian political rhetoric, the ability to work equates worth. This belief extends to the perception that a disabled person may steal work from the most physically able. Dickie comes to recognize that rather than writing himself a space like the child characters in *The Enchanted*

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<sup>77</sup> Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew Humphries, “Worlds Enough and Time: The Cult of Childhood in Edwardian Fiction,” in *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction: Worlds Enough and Time* ed. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew Humphries (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 6.

<sup>78</sup> Lois Keith, *Take up Thy Bed and Walk* (London: The Women’s Press, 2001), 99.

*Castle*, he must abandon his own narrative altogether. Further complicating this construct is that Dickie acts as an agent by choosing to return to the reign of the Stuarts and inhabit a normative body. Mavis Reimer, writing on the intersection of empire and Nesbit's fiction, notes: "To be unable to take up a place within the dominant discourses of a culture is to be incoherent and unintelligible as human subject in that culture."<sup>79</sup> Dickie attempts to imagine himself into intelligibility as a valuable body by owning his agency to live in the past as distinctly able agent, regardless of his disability in the present day. *Harding's Luck* radically rejects the ethos of Utilitarianism even as it finds the only refuge for Dickie in the abandonment, rather than reform, of Edwardian England and his disabled body.

### **London as a Body Broken**

Just as Sharp uses the altering of perspective in her fairy tale, "The Boy Who Looked Like a Girl" (as I observe in chapter 1), Nesbit utilizes a similar technique to reflect a similar model of alienation in *Harding's Luck*. Much like Boy in Sharp's short story, Dickie finds that it is the circumstances that surround him that define his social meaning to others. Rather than opening the novel with a description of Dickie, the narrator focuses instead on Dickie's environment—a London slum. Crucially, this decision inextricably links Dickie to the suburb of New Cross and New Cross to Dickie. The body of the boy and that of the neighborhood become twisted together, inevitably calling to mind the reports and statements about disability in the impoverished areas of London. Disability essentially becomes constructed around Dickie as a

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<sup>79</sup> Mavis Reimer, "The Beginning of the End: Writing Empire in E. Nesbit's Psammead Books," in *E. Nesbit's Psammead Trilogy*, ed. Raymond E. Jones (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006), 53.

social stigma. He wears poverty and his crutch as Sharp's Boy wears his despised smock—inevitably and due to outside influence, even though both have an interiority and sense of self-identification that works counter to their outward appearances. Though clothing and disability are not perfectly analogous, what I want to establish is that characters find objects associated with their appearance mediate the ways in which they interact with others. Before introducing her protagonist and his disability—the condition that ultimately makes Dickie decide to reside permanently in the Jacobean era where he is able-bodied—Nesbit's narrator establishes that London has been broken down in a way that parallels the breaking of Dickie's body, which becomes a metaphor for the horrors of capitalist brutality:

Dickie lived at New Cross. At least the address was New Cross, but really the house where he lived was one of a row of horrid little houses built on the slope where once green fields ran down the hill to the river, and the old houses of the Deptford merchants stood stately in their pleasant gardens and fruitful orchards. All those good fields and happy gardens are built over now. It is as though some wicked giant had taken a big brush full of yellow ochre paint, and another full of mud-colour, and had painted out the green in streaks of dull yellow and filthy brown; and the brown is the roads and the yellow is the houses. Miles and miles and miles of them, and not a green thing to be seen except the cabbages in the greengrocers' shops, and here and there some poor trails of creeping-jenny drooping from a dirty window-sill.<sup>80</sup>

The bucolic landscape of England past cedes to the horrid little houses. The description of the Deptford of yore recalls the language of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (1816),

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<sup>80</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 2.

another work that idealizes a magical unseen place. Industrial England paves over this Romantic allusion with ugly efficiency and the narrator evokes a creature of fairy tales to complete the analogy. The giant calls up the very English tale of Jack and the Beanstalk, especially apropos as Dickie's magic partly resides in enchanted seeds that he plants in hopes of cultivating and reclaiming formerly barren ground. Dickie, the orphan of industry and disabled by impoverished neglect, literally tries to replant England from the ground up inside the slum. Yet even the plants that manage to grow cannot thrive. In one of the more contradictory moments in the novel, this passage condemns the slums but romanticizes an age when the middle class and aristocrats owned and managed the very land ceded in the Edwardian present to the impoverished. Nesbit's narrator draws attention to the ways in which the land appeared beautiful when owned by merchants yet, as the story goes on to imply, a mercantile economy ruins the same landscape it once ruled over. Fairyland, too, in this disorienting description, has essentially mutated into an agent of industry and the traditional English fairy tale becomes corrupted, as does Dickie's body. Though Sharp and Nesbit are never discussed in conjunction, their work shows striking parallels in moments such as this, where the genre of the wonder tale warps and imposes strictures from which the heroes long to break free.

A drooping, rotting London is the embodiment of its capitalist corruption and serves as a metaphor for the ruination of the people seething within its dirty streets and tenements: "And however you may shut people up between bars of yellow and mud colour, and however hard you may make them work, and however little wage you may pay them for working, there will always be found among those people some men who are willing to work a little longer, and for no wages at all, so that they may have green things growing near them."<sup>81</sup> The desperation of the

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<sup>81</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 3.

underpaid worker parallels all that fails to thrive in the modern urban landscape. This highly politicized focus on working-class life contrasts with Parkes's assumption that Nesbit's works are mostly concerned with the lives of bourgeois families: "As a writer of children's fiction, Nesbit is, despite some use of socialist ideology in her narratives, more interested in the economic well-being of the middle classes than a radical redistribution of wealth or a change in the ownership of the means of production."<sup>82</sup> Parkes makes no mention of *Harding's Luck*, which clearly and repeatedly prioritizes the vast disparities in the distribution of wealth, even as the novel reveals a continuing fascination with the English aristocracy.

Dickie's noble lineage, though, seems less about the inherent superiority of or need for a nobility and more invested in the nobility for their socially reforming possibilities. Fabians, by definition, worked to chip away at existing class structures. From this viewpoint, those most poised to command change in a capitalist society are those with economic clout. When Dickie awakes in the Jacobean era as Master Richard, heir of Arden, he recognizes the change that he could effect by having power and respect as an able-bodied member of the peerage:

[...] when he grew up he would be expected to look after his servants and labourers, and all the men and women whom he would have under him—that their happiness and well-being would be his charge. And the thought swelled his heart, and it seemed that he was born to a great destiny. He—little lame Dickie Harding of Deptford—he would hold these people's lives in his hand. Well, he knew what poor people wanted; he had been poor—or he had dreamed that he was poor—it was all the same.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Parkes, *Children's Literature and Capitalism*, 103.

<sup>83</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 84.

The awareness of his own power inspires Dickie, but not without a troubling wresting of political and economic agency from the workers. Dickie's ascendance to wealth and power reveals the problem with Fabianism as an organization dedicated to helping the poor but primarily populated by members who had no direct experience of poverty. Dickie has experienced life as the most marginalized member of English society and now understands it from the vantage point of the most privileged. No mediating middle position exists. Moreover, if Dickie's body also represents the state of the nation, he must represent all of its diverse population.

The city's body, as the story's introduction continues to develop, is broken and littered with discarded bric-a-brac of consumer culture: "But there were not green things growing in the garden at the back of the house where Dickie lived with his aunt. There were stones and bones, and bits of brick, and dirty old dish-cloths matted together with grease and mud, worn-out broom-heads and broken shovel, a bottomless pail, and the mouldy remains of a hutch where once rabbits had lived."<sup>84</sup> Dickie lives surrounded by decay and discarded things. The pastoral sinks into a morass of filth and death haunts the slum in the pieces of bones, as well as the rabbits long missing from the hutch, which a passing man purchases and takes away to Dickie's dismay, as the new owner hauls the hutch away in a barrow from which rabbit-skins hang.<sup>85</sup> The objects around Dickie that, in Nesbit's critical study, *Wings and the Child*, might prove excellent material for world building, in Dickie's story are valueless and no longer productive. The brooms-head cannot sweep, the pail cannot hold water, and a place built to sustain life only emphasizes its loss. These broken domestic items are the detritus of labor; they are anti-Utilitarian; and they are broken like Dickie's foot. Steeped in filth and garbage, London

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<sup>84</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 2.

<sup>85</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 3.

represents not just the objects but also the people thrown away by a capitalist system that can no longer make use of them. Even the earth itself has been rendered sterile in Dickie's backyard—a former site of agricultural plenty that now lies fallow and unproductive.

London crushes nature but, the novel hints, nature always tries to find a way to reclaim its former territory: "Dickie woke, gay as the spring sun that was trying to look in at him through his grimy windows."<sup>86</sup> Dickie first occupies this house with his caretaker and returns to it again first alone, then with Beale, the law-twisting transient who first exploits and ultimately befriends Dickie. The house brings the ugliness of the city into the domestic space. The parlor, the bedrooms, and the yard stand cramped and dirty. When Dickie returns to his old home, abandoned by his former caretaker, the narrator describes the dismal space: "The house was quite dark now, but a street lamp threw its light into the front room, bare, empty, and dusty. There was a torn newspaper on the floor."<sup>87</sup> The newspaper lying on the floor of the house does not edify but serves a highly practical service as Dickie's bed-sheet. The domestic space fails to warm or protect and the street intrudes via the lamplight. Dickie slips back and forth in time until he finds himself again in "the little bare front room" sleeping under newspapers with gaslight coming in through "dirty panes."<sup>88</sup> The word "little" and the emphasis on littleness occur and recur. The home becomes as vulnerable as Dickie's battered frame. Artificial light breaks into the space at night, but dirty glass prevents natural sunlight from entering the home in daytime. When Beale tries to rent the home at Dickie's insistence, the landlord notes the coincidence of Beale also having a lame child as the previous tenant had a lame dependent. The landlord

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<sup>86</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 8.

<sup>87</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 71.

<sup>88</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 97.



carelessly remarks: “It’s a cripple’s home by rights, I should think.”<sup>89</sup> In this crucial moment, disability, home, and the notion of what the disabled person deserves (echoing Shaw’s infamous phrase, spoken and mocked by *Pygmalion*’s reprobate Doolittle, “the deserving poor”) all collide. Dickie, in the view of a modern capitalist, matches the dilapidated house. Assuredly, Beale and Dickie eventually take and reclaim the house, but even they cannot permanently rescue the space. Ultimately, Beale relocates with his dogs to the countryside and Dickie, now assured of Beale’s reformation, retreats into the seventeenth century.

The narrator describes nocturnal London as Dickie wanders through the streets with his crutch: “When he got out of the tram, Dickie asked the way again, this time of a woman who was selling matches in the gutter.”<sup>90</sup> The image of the woman summons Andersen’s story, “The Little Match Girl,” and the 1888 London Match Girls Strike, led by Fabian Annie Besant. Here, however, the woman has not risen up in the decades after the strike but lives quite literally in the gutter. Perhaps a bitter commentary on the failure to secure improved conditions for the poor, the woman Dickie finds in the gutter remains there. When Dickie slips forward to modern England a fourth time, he finds himself transported from an Arcadian past to the streets of London, a site of ugly urbanization and its attendant moral degeneracy: “There was no grass near, only rough trampled earth; the smell all about him was not of roses, but of dust-bins, and there were no nightingales—but far away he could hear that restless roar that is the voice of London, and near at hand the foolish song and unsteady footfall of a man going home from the ‘Cat and Whistle.’”<sup>91</sup> A place of refuse, drunken stumbling, and chaos, London’s body, like Dickie’s foot,

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<sup>89</sup> Nesbit, *Harding’s Luck*, 150.

<sup>90</sup> Nesbit, *Harding’s Luck*, 66.

<sup>91</sup> Nesbit, *Harding’s Luck*, 148.

is beyond the means of modern society to mend. London has not yet consumed Dickie, yet the fate of the slum's inhabitants constantly surrounds and portends Dickie's future if unaltered. Yet no Scrooge will come to rescue Dickie. In the end, the novel suggests that London has been lost to capitalism, an evil over which socialism has not and cannot triumph, necessitating a retreat in the present to England's countryside, ever-diminishing in expansion of industry.

### **The Specter of Dickens' Children in Nesbit's Fiction**

As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, Fabians did not hold a fixed policy or stance on the relations between art and socialism. By the early part of the twentieth century, the lack of a specific Fabian philosophical stance on art had become a point of frustration for many members of the Society. In an important letter, Holbrook Jackson, Fabian and a co-editor of the *New Age* socialist periodical, writes to Edward Pease, Fabian Society secretary: "The F. S. in the past has created a definite Socialist attitude in both Politics & Sociology. Why not do the same for ART and PHILOSOPHY? These seem to me two necessary and legitimate fields for Fabian work."<sup>92</sup> Shaw himself mocks the notion of a static socialist ideology in his work *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*: "Now I will be as frank as St Augustine, and admit that the professed Socialists are also a very mixed lot, and that if joining them meant inviting them indiscriminately to tea I should strongly advise you not to do it, as they are just like other people, which means that some of them steal spoons when they get the chance."<sup>93</sup> Shaw advocated

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<sup>92</sup> Holbrook Jackson to Edward Pease, 11 December 1906, box B, folder 5, Fabian Society Papers.

<sup>93</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* (New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1928), 93.

frequently and famously for didactic art. Perhaps no writer, though, had more cachet with Fabians as a model of influential art than Dickens. As Ian Britain observes in *Fabianism and Culture*: “Dickens himself was one of the most commonly-discussed subject in Fabian lectures on artistic subjects, ranking in popularity with many artists who had rather more direct connections with socialist movements or ideas.”<sup>94</sup> Nesbit certainly was not immune to Dickens’ influence. Both Nesbit biographer Doris Langley Moore and Victorianist Jan Susina have noted the powerful sway that Dickens’ works had on the Nesbit canon.<sup>95</sup> The ghosts of Christmas may not appear in Nesbit’s stories, but the shades of Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1837) and *A Christmas Carol* haunt *Harding’s Luck*. Dickens’ stories shadow not only the themes of Nesbit’s time slip novel but even its framework, as Briggs observes: “Ultimately the plot structure, according to which the child becomes in some sense the protector and teacher of the adult, and thus takes on what are essentially adult responsibilities, can be traced back to Charles Dickens [...] Dickens’ influence is particularly evident in the plot of *Harding’s Luck*, which reworks a number of events from *Oliver Twist*.”<sup>96</sup> The Fabian Society, even from its inception as mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, looked to art to produce social change. A review of George Eliot’s canon in *Seed-Time*, a journal produced by the radical Fellowship of the New Life (the precursor of the Fabian Society), with the title “The Art and Ethics of George Eliot’s Novels,” criticizes Eliot’s later characters for failing to demonstrate sufficient political growth during the

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<sup>94</sup> Britain, *Fabianism and Culture*, 199.

<sup>95</sup> Dorothy Langley Moore, *E. Nesbit: A Biography* (London: Ernest Benn, 1933), 648. Also see Jan Susina, “E. Nesbit’s Literary Borrowings in *Five Children and It*,” in *E. Nesbit’s Psammead Trilogy*, ed. Jones, 151-68.

<sup>96</sup> Briggs, *A Woman of Passion*, 289.

novel.<sup>97</sup> Much like Wallas proclaiming the need to look to Dickens and Zola as models of inciting political change through fiction, Eliot's critic attacks Eliot's canon for moving away from political development. Nesbit, though, seems to progress in the opposite manner, retreating from direct involvement in the Fabian Society as her novels became increasingly political.

Significantly, though, the politics of *Harding's Luck* bind themselves to a complicated literary history. Nesbit unquestionably does not shy away from evils of industrialization when the narrator recalls Dickie's last memory of his father. Bodies broken by society's neglect in the home and in the workplace haunt Nesbit's novel, much as they did Dickens' fiction. The reader learns how the protagonist has come to live as a neglected orphan with an indifferent guardian in a brief recounting of Dickie's last encounter with his father prior to the start of the novel:

"Dickie was taken to say goodbye to him. Goodbye had to be said because of father having fallen off the scaffolding where he was at work and not getting better."<sup>98</sup> Even in non-fiction writing, Fabians frequently invoked the name of *Oliver Twist* to make their political points resonate with their readership. Shaw embraces this trope throughout his socialist writings: "It may shock you to learn that the employees themselves resisted the Factory Acts at first because the Acts began by putting a stop to the ill treatment and overworking of children too young to be decently put to commercial work at all. At first these victims of unregulated Capitalism were little *Oliver Twists*, sold into slavery by the Guardians of the Poor to get rid of them."<sup>99</sup> Like Dickens' *Oliver*, Dickie Harding is portrayed as a victim of unregulated capitalism. He loses his father through commercial negligence and struggles to escape a narrative of pity when he imagines himself as

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<sup>97</sup> A. J. Hobson, "The Art and Ethics of George Eliot's Novels," *Seed-Time* 12 (1892): 3-9.

<sup>98</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 6.

<sup>99</sup> Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*, 192.

the hero of an adventure novel. To enact any adventures, though, he must repeatedly overcome his exploitation by predatory adults.

The heirs of Dickens' Fagin, a devious conman who manipulates a tribe of child beggars, walk the streets of Nesbit's London in the form of a thief, an abusive caretaker, and other suspicious adults.<sup>100</sup> Their crimes inevitably are linked to avarice, the ultimate capitalist vice, rather than crimes of passion. Unlike Nesbit's earlier works, *Harding's Luck* focuses its attention on the most impoverished people of London. Instead of considering the gendering of certain genres, *Harding's Luck* remains determinedly fixed on poverty and crime. For Nesbit and her contemporaries, however, the politics of disability were entrenched in discussions of gender, as in her aforementioned speech to the Fabian Women's Group proves.

In a sense, to discuss disability in the Edwardian era is, by extension, to discuss gender, almost inevitable when the word "disability" itself appeared in a variety of debates and discussions about enfranchisement from the Victorian period onward. *Harding's Luck* contains complex, contradictory portrayals of disability and maternity. In the majority of Nesbit's work, parents are largely absent or benign figures. For Dickie, modern day parental figures abuse their influence and power. In the early pages of the novel, the narrator introduces Dickie's disability with adult accountability: "Dickie went. He went slowly, because he was lame. And he was lame because his 'aunt' had dropped him when he was a baby."<sup>101</sup> Disability and abuse thus become intrinsically linked for the whole of the novel. With each excruciating reminder that he is lame,

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<sup>100</sup> I do not include the two Jewish characters of *Harding's Luck* in this allusion, as they are not Dickie's antagonists, though both embody other repellent anti-Semitic stereotypes. Mr. Rosenberg even has a pronounced lisp. Where Dickie's disability elicits concern and raises questions about English society, Rosenberg's lisp serves to mark him out as ridiculous which, combined with his disinterest in Dickie, mark him as othered in a pronounced, negative light.

<sup>101</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 4.

the narrator reinforces that Dickie is a victim of neglect. In her speech to the Fabian Women's Society, Nesbit advocated the endowment of maternity, insisting that this was women's true calling and putting maternity and non-maternal employment in opposition for "the cause of mankind is greater than the cause of women."<sup>102</sup> In *Harding's Luck*, the story of the "aunt" (who later, with another criminal, kidnaps Dickie in order to extort a ransom from Dickie's wealthy uncle) is emblematic of natural life and maternal instinct that have been twisted and ultimately annihilated in the slums of Deptford. The novel portrays maternity in this underprivileged part of London as a thing perverted and warped, and perhaps driving even more fiercely her desire to see properly modeled maternity in the vastly middle-class and upper-class women of the Society.

So militant is Nesbit at this point about maternity superseding all other careers for women that she even adopts the increasingly popular propaganda of eugenicists, who threatened race extinction and blamed women's university education on the diminishment of maternal instinct. In the suppressed transcript of Nesbit's speech, Nesbit clearly states her belief that maternity and nationalism are jeopardized by suffragism, which she perceives as antagonistic toward childbearing:

And supposing that, by training and teaching women to use their brains, it were possible, contrary to received opinion regarding the transmission of acquired characteristics, to produce a crop of geniuses, it would have to be at the expense of the mother characteristics which are woman's *raison d'être*; and thus the

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<sup>102</sup> Shaw, *Summary of Seven Papers and Discussions upon the Disabilities of Women as Workers*, 7.

cultivation of the intellectual or masculine characteristics of women would end in sterility and race extermination.<sup>103</sup>

Nesbit's speech contradicts much of her fiction and non-fiction writing. In light of Nesbit's comments, Shaw's insistence on excising the speech from the written record makes excellent sense given the fodder her presentation would have provided for the Fabians' political opponents.

Rather than mark a permanent shift in her attitudes, Nesbit's lecture isolates a moment in which she appears to be examining where her socialism corresponds with the developing politics of the Fabian Society. Her response, in fact, contradicts some of the content of *Harding's Luck*, which produces a far more ambivalent view of maternal care than Nesbit's valorization of maternity to the Fabian Society might suggest. As mentioned, Dickie lives with an "aunt," a non-relation who verbally and physically abuses him and whose early abuse caused Dickie's disability. The best the narrator can offer on the aunt's behalf is that she has raised the orphaned Dickie: "She did keep Dickie when his father died, and she might have sent him to the workhouse."<sup>104</sup> When Dickie stays in the home of Lady Talbot, a benevolent aristocrat, she expresses a desire to adopt Dickie, whom she has cared for after he participates in an attempt to burglarize her home. With the tramp Beale, Dickie goes on adventures of the sort he has read about in novels, but Lady Talbot's attempts to mother Dickie lead to some of Dickie's most

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<sup>103</sup> Shaw, *Summary of Seven Papers and Discussions upon the Disabilities of Women as Workers*, 6.

<sup>104</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 5.

vulnerable moments. After realizing that Beale and his co-conspirator<sup>105</sup> have fled and abandoned him, Dickie ends up trapped without his crutch:

Somehow Dickie could not bear to let that lady see him crawl clumsily across the floor, as he had to do when he moved without his crutch. It was not because he thought she would make fun of him; perhaps it was because he knew she would not. And yet without his crutch, how else was he to get to that bath? And for no reason that he could have given he began to cry.

The lady's arms were round him in an instant.

"What is it, dear? Whatever is it?" she asked; and Dickie sobbed out—

"I ain't got my crutch, and I can't go to that there barf without I got it.

Anything ud do— if 'twas only an old broom cut down to me 'eighth. I'm a cripple, they call it, you see. I can't walk like wot you can."<sup>106</sup>

Here Nesbit's narrative recognizes that the very upper-class maternity espoused in Nesbit's remarks to the Fabian Women's Group can entrap as much as nurture. A poor woman who should nurture destroys and the aristocratic woman confines. Dickie fears being the object of pity or coddling when he longs to be recognized as the agent of his own adventures, traveling the open road and sleeping under the stars. The priorities of loving maternity run counter to the generic conventions of the boy's adventure story in which Dickie longs to participate. Lady Talbot's desire for Dickie to be her pet would place him in the trite domestic rehabilitation novels in the tradition of Burnett's *Secret Garden*. Dickie's anguish bursts out specifically when

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<sup>105</sup> The second thief, who later colludes with Dickie's former caretaker to kidnap him, is described repeatedly as red-haired to signal that this outward characteristic marks his corrupt nature.

<sup>106</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 53.



he endures this emasculating empathy. Dickie must constantly resist the attempts of the women that he encounters to keep him as a pet. Women with misplaced maternalism seek to nurture and keep him in a way that denies both Dickie's agency and his longing for freedom outside a constrained domestic environment. When Dickie stows away to London in a basket in order to escape Lady Talbot's maternal clutches, he is discovered by young ladies in a florist shop who coo over him and treat him as a lost animal that they have found, asking their employer: "We may keep him, mayn't we, Mr. Rosenberg?"<sup>107</sup> Though the young women in question do not intend to adopt Dickie permanently, their language again relegates the disabled Dickie to the status of an object to be lost and found, and he again sneaks away from feminine oversight. The story thus becomes a gendered space where women display the greatest empathy and the greatest desire to stifle through domestication. Similarly, the narrator of the story vacillates between emphasizing Dickie's need for independence as an intelligent and active boy and the construction of Dickie in more passive, domestic moments as a pathetic Tiny Tim, an object to be displayed to incite compassion rather than camaraderie.

*Harding's Luck* is Nesbit's most Dickensian work but, as such, it puts Nesbit's desire to highlight social problems in direct conflict with her equally pronounced wish to show that this disabled character has enormous talent and ability to survive. On the one hand, in order to ignite pity and a cry to action, Dickie must passively suffer as society's victim. On the other hand, in order to be the boy hero, he must challenge the idea that his disability negates this role. Part of the difficulty for Nesbit seems to stem from the tradition of Dickens and his portrayals of the brutal life of industrialized London that he knew and had experienced firsthand. Fabian writer Graham Wallas showcases the influence of Dickens' fiction as a drive for socialism and

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<sup>107</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 66.

argues that fiction has the power to force readers to extend sympathy to those whose suffering they might otherwise choose to inure themselves.<sup>108</sup> By early 1904, Wallas had resigned from the Society, but his views prior to this time had influence and paralleled the dominant beliefs of the Fabians. Nesbit's mission to draw criticism for poverty, abuse, and filthy housing loses some power when the hero does not especially mind his circumstances provided that he can move and learn as he wishes. A Dickensian tradition almost implicitly calls on the artist to emulate the transformative powers of Tiny Tim for the conversion of a Scrooge-like skeptic. One of Tiny Tim's most marked characteristics, other than his crutch, is his littleness. A moment that perfectly embodies the struggle of highlighting Dickie's vulnerability while simultaneously underscoring his ability occurs in the first chapter: "With his little crutch, made out of a worn-out broom cut down to his little height, he could manage quite well in spite of his lameness."<sup>109</sup> The emphasis on Dickie's diminutive size with the double repetition acts counter to the narrator's remark of his ability. The worn-out broom reinforces the image of poverty and desperate improvisation to meet the boy's needs. Dickie spends the next several chapters displaying remarkable ingenuity and a longing for adventure. This littleness appears again when Lady Talbot suggests adopting Dickie, asking him to be her "little boy" twice, and then bleeds into the narration itself, which mentions Dickie's "little soul" and "little brain."<sup>110</sup> With each attempt to undermine his agency, he physically diminishes. Fundamentally, Dickie's decision to return to the past where he can exist as person and not the object of misplaced pity or condescending charity rejects the model of Tiny Tim.

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<sup>108</sup> See Graham Wallas, "The Motive Power," *Sunday Chronicle* (11 November 1890): 7.

<sup>109</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 5.

<sup>110</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 56.

Where Tiny Tim unknowingly and passively inspires the flint-hearted Scrooge to remodel the latter's life (and, by extension, Tiny Tim's future), Dickie instead actively works to—and actually does—reform an adult male, Beale. Jim Beale is a criminal scamp that Dickie encounters in London and with whom Dickie begins a career of begging. Dickie, though, should not be and will not be relegated to secondary role in his own story, which takes an interest in the reformation of Beale's moral character, but not at the expense of shifting the action away from Dickie. Although the reforming of the errant adult has shades of the Fauntleroy-esque, the novel continually positions Dickie as an agent of social change through Dickie's deliberate actions rather than passive inspiration. Yet Dickie never manages to eclipse his lame foot and cannot escape the pain of this awareness after living as able-bodied boy. With each three-hundred-year slip backward, he bonds his joy to loss of disability: "And one happiness was to all the other happinesses of that day as the sun is to little stars—and that happiness was the happiness of being once more a little boy who did not need to use a crutch."<sup>111</sup> Dickie may have agency, as Briggs argues, yet he also is a body acted upon by his government's neglect: "His lameness gives symbolic expression to the maimed society that refuses to make adequate provision for its motherless and superfluous children; it is also the direct consequence of inadequate child care. Both symbolically and literally the damaged child serves as a reproach to his society."<sup>112</sup> The last line in Briggs's analysis could apply equally to *Harding's Luck* and *A Christmas Carol*. It is critical to note that I here make a distinction between the disability of *Harding's Luck*, which is never inherited but rather caused by external circumstances of neglect, and my analysis of disability in Jean Webster's novels in chapter 3. The latter focuses its concerns vis-à-vis

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<sup>111</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 135.

<sup>112</sup> Briggs, *A Woman of Passion*, 290.

disability entirely—even obsessively—on congenital disability. This distinction also reinforces the Dickensian nature of the story. Like Tiny Tim’s rickets, Dickie’s lameness was entirely preventable, though unlike Tiny Tim’s disease, Dickie’s spinal injury cannot be fixed by medical intervention but only by magic. *Harding’s Luck* struggles as text to reconcile its competing desires to empower its hero and draw critical attention and sympathy to capitalist failures. Unnecessarily broken or non-normative bodies represent the country’s mutilation of its own citizens through economic oppression and neglect. Whereas Dickens hopes to reform through sentimental liberal individual action and education, however, Nesbit reminds readers that some damage cannot be undone with a change of heart—the entire country must be reformed. Sympathy does not replace or substitute for government action.

Briggs observes that Nesbit had a personal connection with a young man, Douglas Kennedy, who used a wheelchair and that it was this acquaintance that roused a particular interest in Nesbit.<sup>113</sup> The same year that she brought out *Harding’s Luck*, Nesbit published *Salome and the Head: A Modern Melodrama* (1909), which features a protagonist who uses a wheelchair. The two stories are quite different: the first (as we have seen) focuses on the social conditions that break the body, whereas the latter explores the romance of a man emasculated by his disability. The children’s book, not the adult novel, thus serves the locus for exploring how a society constructs disability as a form of political disenfranchisement, even as Dickie resists such attempts when others want to build narratives of charity and pity around him. Dickie, as such, represents Nesbit’s first serious foray into the social model of disability. One of the earlier scholars to write on this subject and to develop links between disability studies and children’s literature, Kathy Saunders, argues for the need to have a more nuanced conversation about the

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<sup>113</sup> Briggs, *A Woman of Passion*, 228.

role of disability in children's literature studies and the importance of differentiating between medical and social models of disability. She writes: "In contrast, the social model of disability addresses the barriers to full participation in society caused by the practical, environmental, attitudinal or administrative framework of that society."<sup>114</sup> *Harding's Luck* has a grounded and highly specific interest in this distinction: the medical aspects of Dickie's lameness matter far less than how social constructions around him—and even Dickie himself—interpret Dickie. The rubrics of an English social model devalue him as a member of society.

Crucially, the disabled body always aligns with Dickie's modern impoverished life. When he is able-bodied in the sixteenth-century, he occupies a position of power and influence within the aristocracy. The juxtaposition is a contradictory one given the socialist impulses driving the text. Jacobean England has a rigid class system in which Dickie (as Richard) occupies a space of privilege, wealth, and power all of which align with also being able-bodied. Children's literature scholar Maria Nikolajeva mentions *Harding's Luck* in one of the earlier scholarly articles on Nesbit, but incorrectly describes Dickie as possessing the body of another boy in the past,<sup>115</sup> more accurately, during his time slip his lame leg mends, or, put more precisely, in a pre-urbanized England social conditions do not disable Dickie. Jacobean England and Edwardian England represent an able-bodied/disabled binary between which Dickie shifts repeatedly. The transition does not change Dickie's character, but the transitions force him into greater awareness of his marginalized status with each return to the present day. With each reversion to his disabled body when traveling back to modern times, Dickie finds that his

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<sup>114</sup> Kathy Saunders, "What Disability Studies Can Do for Children's Literature," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2004), accessed 20 June 2014, <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/849/1024>.

<sup>115</sup> Maria Nikolajeva, "Edith Nesbit—The Maker of Modern Fairy Tales," *Merveilles & contes*, 1, no. 1 (1987): 41.

disability becomes ever more psychologically excruciating. He does not hate his disability until he recognizes how others see him differently when he inhabits an able-bodied frame:

Dickie looked down at his feet. In the old New Cross days he had not liked to look at his feet. He had not looked at them in these new days. Now he looked. Hesitated.

“Come,” said the nurse encouragingly.

He slid from the high bed. One might as well try. Nurse seemed to think... He touched the ground with both feet, felt the floor firm and even under them—as firm and even under the one foot as under the other. He stood up straight, moved the foot that he had been used to move—then the other, the one that he had never moved. He took two steps, three, four—and then he turned suddenly and flung himself against the side of the bed and hid his face in his arms.

“What, weeping, my lamb?” the nurse said, and came to him.

“Oh, Nurse,” he cried, clinging to her with all his might. “I dreamed that I was lame! And I thought it was true. And it isn’t!—it isn’t!—it isn’t!”<sup>116</sup>

The repetition of “little” (previously mentioned in this chapter) cedes to a repetition of “firm” and “even.” Fully able-bodied in this historical moment, Dickie embraces his new status and the privileges his able-bodiedness confers. Nesbit’s narrator never critically examines the novel’s idealization of Jacobean life. *Harding’s Luck* entirely omits any address of the 1597 Act for the Relief of the Poor or the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601, which forced the “impotent poor”—which would have included a lame boy like modern Dickie—into poorhouses. The law severely restricted movement and continued to have effect well into 1606, the year to which Dickie slips

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<sup>116</sup> Nesbit, *Harding’s Luck*, 85-86.

back. The novel is not invested in representing a historically accurate past so much as presenting an England that never was as a way of positing a present day Edwardian England that does not exist but perhaps could be reimagined, just as Nesbit has reimagined the past.

Part of what makes this reimagining difficult and that complicates Nesbit's portrayal of disability is that *Harding's Luck* suggests that the external state of Dickie's non-normative body reflects the corrupted internal workings of the nation-state. To briefly revisit In *Narrative Prosthesis*, David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder discuss the nineteenth-century link between the body and internal self, using Hans Christian Andersen's *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* (1838).<sup>117</sup> Andersen's work, as I noted in my chapter on Sharp, had a significant impact on Fabian children's fiction writers. Dickie operates throughout the novel both as a character and a symbolic national body, both of which find healing through a return to a highly romanticized and historically improbable English past. The novel still addresses Dickie's conflict upon finding both body and temporality shifted. During the time-slip portion of the novel, Dickie struggles to reestablish his own sense of identity when he finds the surrounding environment destabilized.<sup>118</sup> His identity slips along with time and his disability: "Was he Dickie Harding who had lived at New Cross, and sown the Artistic Parrot Seed, and taken the open road with Mr. Beale? Or was he that boy with the other name whose father was a knight, and who lived in a house in Deptford with green trees outside the windows?"<sup>119</sup> Dickie simultaneously knows himself as disabled and

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<sup>117</sup> For reference, see page 16 in the introduction of this dissertation for the extended quotation. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 58.

<sup>118</sup> This scene vividly invokes Lewis Carroll's Alice in her journey down the rabbit hole when she attempts to establish her own identity by juxtaposing her sense of self against that of a girl named Mabel.

<sup>119</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 90.

able-bodied, working-class and aristocratic, and impoverished and affluent. As the national body, he represents a people divided by a capitalist system into extremes. Jacobean England becomes a Wonderland of sorts in which Dickie realizes that he can reconceptualize his own identity and body as an English child. Recent attention has been given to the politicization of disability and transnational discourse on disability in response.<sup>120</sup> Here, though, Dickie represents a politicization of the disabled body that is hyper-nationalized. He *is* the state of England. Reimer contends that in Nesbit's Psammead trilogy, "the self is the new realm of empire."<sup>121</sup> In other words, the child becomes both an agent of empire and a body onto which empire is mapped. So, too, is Dickie's body the body of the English body of a broken British Empire. Dickie is the embodiment of an unhealthy industrialized England populated by citizens bent with rickets and sickened by respiratory disease due to industrial pollution. He is the symbol of crumbling houses filling London slums. He represents the deterioration of the domestic space and an imagined bucolic agricultural life.

Dickie's body, as I mention above, has been broken by the very city and country it represents. Nesbit's dystopic vision of London and the ruined English countryside echoes throughout her twentieth-century writings. In her critical analysis of Nesbit's *Story of the Amulet*, Suzanne Rahn writes:

Unconsciously, [the child protagonists] are searching for utopia as well. This implicit quest takes the form of a symbolic structural pattern repeated again and again: denunciation of Edwardian London, its ugliness and its cruelty to the

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<sup>120</sup> Karen Soldatic and Shaun Grech, "Transnationalizing Disability Studies: Rights, Justice and Impairment," *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 32, no. 2 (2014), accessed 20 June 2014, <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/4249>.

<sup>121</sup> Reimer, "The Beginning of the End," 58.



poor—and praise of another, very different city, whose beauty is both physical and spiritual. London, the ugly city, represents our cruel and corrupt capitalist civilization; the beautiful city represents civilization as it should be. This pattern is designed to be a kind of education process, encouraging the young reader to realize that our civilization is loathsome and that alternative and better civilizations can exist.<sup>122</sup>

Dickie's aunt, Beale, the red-headed thief, the matron and daughter who offer Dickie charity—all of these characters participate in reinforcing the idea that Dickie's body is a commodity or a means to financial gain. In a capitalist society, his body only has monetary value through begging and as an object of charity and is devalued in the workforce. Fabian writers such as Nesbit and Shaw invoke able-bodiedness as the epitome of socialist promise. In Shaw's *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*, he predicts that critics of socialists will accuse them of “making no distinction between lords and laborers, babies in arms and able-bodied adults, drunkards and teetotalers”<sup>123</sup> To be disabled, by extension, is to be a babe in arms. What is so striking, then, is that Dickie resists this binary continually and struggles to find an alternative. *Harding's Luck* seems to anticipate a changing narrative of disability. Social reformer Douglas C. McMurtie had a strong influence on socialist activists that wanted a way to allow non-traditional workers an entre into the workforce, as Keith observes:

Published in New York, Boston and London at the beginning of the twentieth century, McMurtie was prolific in his writing and efforts on behalf of disabled children. In 1912, he told the story of a “crippled boy raised from absolute

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<sup>122</sup> Suzanne Rahn, “News from E. Nesbit: *The Story of the Amulet* and the Socialist Utopia,” in *E. Nesbit's Psammead Trilogy*, ed. Jones, 190.

<sup>123</sup> Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*, 93.

dependence and given an education.” Unusually for the day, he advocated the non-residential system and laid out both the ethical and the practical principles involved in the “restoration of crippled children to places as useful members of the community.”<sup>124</sup>

As I previously noted, Dickie offers a continued resistance to attempts to coddle or exploit him. Instead, he searches to be useful and productive through carving and the moral reformation of Beale. However, during his penultimate excursion into the past Dickie ends up in a battle and kills a Roundhead soldier. On returning to the present day, Dickie makes a self-aware connection between his agency in the past and being able-bodied. Stumbling down the hill with cousins Elfrida and Eldred in Edwardian England, Dickie realizes that for all that he has achieved in the modern era, he does not have the opportunity to be a hero in any traditional narrative as a lame boy. As Dickie and his cousins escape the fray and slip forward in time, the narrator slips away in a moment of free indirect discourse: “the children went down the hill as quickly as they could—which was not very quickly because of Dickie’s poor lame foot. The boy who had killed Cromwell’s man with his little sword had not been lame.”<sup>125</sup> Since the boys’ adventure novel usually centers on a male child who acts as a powerful agent, in this moment Dickie consciously apprehends that he cannot and will not be the hero he envisions in modern discourse. When Lord Arden announces to the community that Dickie is, in fact, the true heir and that he will cede the title to Dickie, the latter’s lameness becomes even more pronounced: “Dickie, little lame Dickie, who stood there leaning on his crutch, pale as death.”<sup>126</sup> When Dickie

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<sup>124</sup> Keith, *Take up thy Bed and Walk*, 155.

<sup>125</sup> Nesbit, *Harding’s Luck*, 267.

<sup>126</sup> Nesbit, *Harding’s Luck*, 272.

fights the Roundheads and slays an enemy soldier in the past, the descriptor “little” attaches itself to a sword, which Dickie wields with deadly accuracy. That littleness in the twentieth century evokes Tiny Tim and a position of weakness and subjugation, exaggerating Dickie’s disability. Through the sword, he becomes a protector of the English monarchy. His agonizing sense of unworthiness cannot be separated from the lame foot. Dickie rues that the wealth, titles, and land of his cousins will be transferred away from them. Instead, this English aristocratic inheritance would cede to Dickie, who thinks of himself as “the little cripple from Deptford,” the boy with the “lame foot,” “only a tramp boy.”<sup>127</sup> In the Jacobean past, he rescues his cousins. In the Edwardian period, they must rescue him after he is kidnapped and bound.

In the happy ending, Dickie—by choice—returns to a past where he has never been dropped as a baby or run over by a carriage in a crowded London street. The narrator describes Dickie’s Jacobean life and the sword has once again taken the crutch’s place: “And Dickie himself. I see him in his ruff and cloak, with his little sword by his side, living out the life he has chosen in the old England when James the First was King. I see him growing in grace and favour, versed in book learning, expert in all noble sports and exercises. For Dickie is not lame now.”<sup>128</sup> Strangely, the novel appears to equate Dickie’s book learning with his able-bodiedness, in direct contradiction with the earlier sections of the novel in which Dickie shows himself a voracious reader, able to assimilate highly complicated material and remodel his speech to sound more educated. Perhaps what is most striking in this passage is the gap between Dickie and the narrator. The narrator, also the voice guilty of historical revisionism and romanticizing English aristocracy, does not see Dickie as he views himself. In a way, the narrator only comes to

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<sup>127</sup> Nesbit, *Harding’s Luck*, 274.

<sup>128</sup> Nesbit, *Harding’s Luck*, 280.

recognize Dickie once he is able-bodied. Dickie, however, always has recognized himself as an individual capable of imagining and inhabiting grand adventures which, as the novel's plot bears out, he does. At the start of the novel, class is a performance that Dickie nearly performs with success. By the conclusion of the story, he inhabits his new class and body fully, showing that class may be a performance, but that Dickie cannot succeed without abandoning his disabled body. In mentioning the little sword—a traditional symbol of battle and sexual prowess—Nesbit unintentionally calls to mind the infamous phrase, the “impotent poor,” as weapon supplants crutch. In a bucolic seventeenth century, he matures and becomes a supporter instead of the supported, both economically as the heir to a valuable estate and in a more literal sense. The narrator romantically proceeds: “I see him, a tall youth, straight and strong, lending the old nurse his arm to walk in the trim, beautiful garden at Deptford.”<sup>129</sup> Just as his body is unbroken and restored, so too is an imagined England—one uncorrupted by encroaching industrialization and the stratification of rich and poor.

Changes in Fabian attitudes toward the disabled were on the horizon. Shaw's *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* appeared a full decade after the end of World War I, and disabled bodies in the wake of the blinding, bone-crushing, and psychologically shattering brutality of the trenches took on new meaning. The state, Shaw argues, holds responsibility for these mutilated young men as much as for the Dickies of urban England. As he recounts the celebrations at the conclusion of World War I, he claims that the joy has less to do with victory than an ending: “the stoppage of the Red Cross vans from the terminuses of the Channel railways with their heartbreaking loads of mutilated men, was what we danced for so wildly and pitifully.”<sup>130</sup> The

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<sup>129</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 280.

<sup>130</sup> Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*, 156.

state continues to recruit and break bodies, but Dickie's foot remains in pre-1914 England the ultimate symbol of the physical deterioration so despised and feared by the English government. Until the aftermath of World War I, when the English government would be forced to recognize its culpability in the destruction of citizens' bodies, the body broken is a symbol of deterioration from within the state.<sup>131</sup>

The only solution to fixing these bodies, *Harding's Luck* implies, is in completely rewriting the past but, since this cannot be done outside the realm of fantasy, a magical history can be a place of only temporary refuge. Bodies human and urban have moved terrifyingly and grotesquely out of control and socialist promise wilts. Viewed as historical fantasy, the novel may more accurately be read as a socialist tragedy, or perhaps in its darkest moments a tale of dystopic London. When Dickie realizes during his first time slip that he can walk, he joyfully races around the room:

He sprang out of bed and went leaping round the room, jumping on to chairs and off them, running and dancing.

“What ails the child?” the nurse grumbled; “get thy hose on, for shame, taking a chill as like as not. What ails thee to act so?”

“It's the not being lame,” Dickie explained, coming to a standstill by the window that looked out on the good green garden. “You don't know how wonderful it seems, just at first, you know, *not* to be lame.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> The language of disability peppers Fabian writings, but gains noticeable prominence in Nesbit and Shaw. Though the two had increasingly differing visions of socialism and suffrage, they seemed to agree certainly on one point: “In giving all the work to one class and all the leisure to another as far as the law will let it, the Capitalist system disables the rich as completely as the poor.” Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*, 165.

<sup>132</sup> Nesbit, *Harding's Luck*, 129-30.

Restored to an England of historical revisionist fantasy, he plainly states that the nurse cannot know what his restoration means. Only in the past can England herself be restored and rewritten along with Dickie. As the novel acknowledges, bodies move, warp, and circulate in ways difficult or impossible to control, and across the Atlantic —as I show in the next chapter—it is this concern that drives the fiction of American Fabian Jean Webster.

### Chapter Three

#### “Hooray, I’m a Fabian!”:

#### Social Reform and Eugenics in Jean Webster’s *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy*

*Dear Comrade,*

Hooray! I’m a Fabian.

That’s a socialist who’s willing to wait. We don’t want the social revolution to come to-morrow morning; it would be too upsetting. We want it to come very gradually in the distant future, when we shall all be prepared and able to sustain the shock.

In the meantime we must be getting ready, by instituting industrial, educational and orphan asylum reforms.

Yours, with fraternal love,

JUDY.<sup>1</sup>

Jean Webster’s *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1912) quickly became a best-selling novel upon publication, garnering praise and enthusiastic reviews as its popularity increased. *Dear Enemy* (1915), by contrast, was published to far less ceremony but with a much more aggressive brand of political reform than its predecessor.<sup>2</sup> In *Daddy-Long-Legs*, Fabian reform prioritizes Judy’s agency through education, suffragism, and a critique of contemporary models of charity and philanthropy that constantly threaten Judy’s self-empowerment. As Judy writes in her letter, she

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs* (New York: The Century Company, 1912), 219.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Webster, *Dear Enemy* (New York: The Century Company, 1915).

is “getting ready” to participate as a socialist and citizen. Unlike the Victorian trope of the beleaguered, pitiful orphan, Judy retains full control over almost the entire narrative and uses the letter’s form as a means of constantly reinventing herself and her recipient. Webster rejects sentimentalism for progressivism. Rather than entreating the reader for sympathy (though the novel did inspire institutional reforms for American orphanages), the novel advocates advancement through independence from state institutions. Yet Webster’s politics sharply alter between *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy* as the eugenics movement and its proponents gained influence on both sides of the Atlantic. The sequel follows Sallie McBride, Judy’s former college classmate, who agrees to put her debutante life on hold in order to take over the John Grier Home until a suitable replacement can be found. Though also in epistolary form, *Dear Enemy* diverges in numerous ways from its predecessor: Sallie writes to multiple correspondents, none of whom is anonymous; she constantly must navigate a series of new technologies including the telephone and telegram, which are unreliable and occasionally disruptive; and finally and most important, the novel invests its political energies into considering the study and applications of eugenics, which had begun to seriously hold of those involved in the running and reforming of institutions in the United States. In both of Webster’s novels, she demonstrates a sustained interest in how the epistolary narrative may be remodeled, even as the letter is becoming more outmoded as form of communication technology. In *Dear Enemy*, however, Sallie constantly navigates suspicious bodies—orphans of mysterious or “unspeakable” heredity that she must train, place, and manage as she sets about reforming the institution that contains them. Whereas Judy finds her freedom from known ancestry liberating, Sallie struggles to reconcile her belief in environmental influence with genetic destiny.



*Daddy-Long-Legs* centers on life of Jerusha “Judy” Abbott whose tongue-in-cheek essay on life in the John Grier Home orphan asylum, “Blue Wednesday,” so impresses one trustee that he agrees to fund Judy’s education at a private women’s college. As part of his wish to remain anonymous, he insists that Judy, in return, must provide periodic correspondence detailing her educational progress. After the third-person omniscient narrator opens the novel on the day of the mysterious trustee’s fortuitous visit, the novel quickly shifts to epistolary form. Judy endows her unknown patron with the spidery pseudonym having once glanced at his long, spindly shadow. *Daddy-Long-Legs* focuses entirely on Judy’s experience and perspective, since her benefactor refuses to respond to her letters other than through rare communications from his secretary. Judy eagerly embraces the task, but describes not merely her coursework, but also her search for and choice of various identities: vocational, religious, and political. The letter writing, which is meant to distance Judy and “Mr. Smith,” a benefactor who has selected as generic a sobriquet as possible, instead becomes a tool for Judy to explore her own voice as a writer and individual. The lack of reciprocity in her correspondence gives Judy unparalleled power and agency as she shapes both her epistles and a host of imaginary recipients. Certainly, Judy’s concerns and interests are extensive, but the constant presence of the John Grier Home forces her to consider its role in the formation of her character. The novel foregrounds the institution’s social concerns and, consequently, places the romance in the background. During her junior year of college, Judy decides that she is a socialist, and much of her previous and subsequent political commentary suggests a serious commitment to addressing social inequalities. Yet despite the novel’s substantive content, the typical critical response to it—though positive—has treated the narrative as an ephemeral entertainment rather than a politically serious work.

In 1912, for example, an anonymous reviewer described *Daddy-Long-Legs* in highly complimentary, albeit flippant, language: “This is a whimsical little wisp of a story, as slight as a cobweb, but full of a quaint charm and rippling with humor that is partly girlish spirits and partly a delightful sense of drollery.”<sup>3</sup> Whatever the reviewer’s condescension to Webster’s “girlish” prose, the book became a publishing juggernaut. Such enormous success, however, did little to overturn routine dismissals of the novel and its sequel. Prominent American authors treated *Daddy-Long-Legs* as unworthy of serious literary merit. Webster’s uncle, Mark Twain, praised her work of fiction in a private letter, but without careful consideration: “[*Daddy-Long-Legs*] is limpid, bright, sometimes brilliant; it is easy, flowing, effortless, and brimming with girlish spirits; it is light, very light, but so is its subject.”<sup>4</sup> The novel received further dismissive treatment even in one canonical work of twentieth-century American literature. In F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night* (1934), Dick Diver examines a series of letters sent to him by a young woman and acerbically notes their similarity to popular fiction of the period: “So far it was easy to recognize the tone—from ‘Daddy-Long-Legs’ and ‘Molly-Make-Believe,’ sprightly and sentimental epistolary collections enjoying a vogue in the States.”<sup>5</sup> Whether one ascribes this casual dismissal of Webster’s *Daddy-Long-Legs* and Eleanor Halowell Abbott’s *Molly-Make-Believe* (1910) to the character Dick or hears Fitzgerald lurking behind it, Fitzgerald casually links the epistolary romance of Halowell Abbott’s insipid, sniveling Molly with Webster’s young

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<sup>3</sup> Review of Jean Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, *New York Times* (12 October 1912): 6.

<sup>4</sup> Clara Clemens, *My Father Mark Twain* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931), 108.

<sup>5</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* ([1934] New York: Scribner, 1996), 136.

New Woman heroine Judy.<sup>6</sup> Unlike *Molly-Make-Believe*, however, the more ambitious *Daddy-Long-Legs* remained a popular novel and had numerous adaptations during the century following its publication.

The immense popularity of *Daddy-Long-Legs* spawned a highly successful stage production, starring Ruth Chatterton, which led to a national tour with performances in almost all major American cities.<sup>7</sup> Numerous films followed: a 1919 production starring silver screen darling Mary Pickford; a Janet Gaynor version in 1931; the Dutch production *Vadertje Langbeen* (1938); the Shirley Temple vehicle *Curly Top* (1935); a musical version with Fred Astaire and Leslie Caron in 1955; the Japanese anime series *Watashi No Ashinaga Ojisan* (1990); and even a Korean adaptation, *Kidari ajeossi* (2005), which first appeared at the International Farj Film Festival in Iran, where the novel also endures as a national favorite. *Daddy-Long-Legs* even inspired the formation of numerous charities. A 1914 fundraiser featured the production and sale of Judy dolls to assist institutionalized children.<sup>8</sup> The novel's charitable associations have such

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<sup>6</sup> Eleanor Hallowell Abbott, *Molly-Make-Believe* (New York: The Century Company, 1911). Abbott's novel is a romance between a young male invalid who subscribes to a letter-writing company during his illness and falls in love with his correspondent, who turns out to be Molly, a passive, insipid young woman (rescued from independence) who happily marries her dull suitor. Where *Daddy-Long-Legs* celebrates Judy's agency and education, Abbott's highly sentimental novel valorizes Molly's marriage to end her domestic isolation.

<sup>7</sup> [Anon.] Obituary for Jean Webster, *New York Times* (12 June 1916): 11.

<sup>8</sup> [Anon.] "Doll Sale to Aid Children," *New York Times* (30 November 1914): 9. "Through an arrangement made my Miss Mary Vida Clark of the Children's Committee of the State Charities Aid Association the distribution of 10,000 Daddy Long-Legs will start today [...] The money received is to be used to improve the condition of the 35,000 children in the institutions of the State and to help in finding homes for them."

clout in modern Japan that a famous global charity for orphans, Ashinaga, takes its name from the Japanese title of Webster's novel.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, in spite of the novel's extraordinary impact, *Daddy-Long-Legs* remains mostly critically ignored by literary scholars. Frothy reviews or descriptions, such as the *New York Times* article, have consistently diminished the novel's serious social and political ambitions by focusing on its romantic conclusion and light tone. Yet when Judy declares herself a Fabian, she demonstrates a clear knowledge of the goals of the Fabian movement and what specific institutions she would seek to reform. Not only that, she announces her political identity by modifying the address itself, emending her usual "Dear Daddy-Long-Legs" with "Dear Comrade." Through the epistolary construct, she shifts the usual address from anonymous patriarch and patron to a word that brings Daddy-Long-Legs into camaraderie with her newfound political identity. Rather than revolution, Judy thus cleverly and quietly models the approach of the Fabian movement in her letter, making small changes that over time may lead to larger political and social shifts.

By the publication of *Daddy-Long-Legs*, the American Fabian Society already had reached the apex of its American popularity and begun to dwindle, in spite of the involvement of prominent and popular American authors Edward Bellamy and Charlotte Perkins Gilman (writing under her married name Stetson).<sup>10</sup> Although *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy* share

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<sup>9</sup> John M. Glionna, "To the Japanese Orphans' Rescue," *Los Angeles Times* (11 December 2011), accessed 10 February 2015, ProQuest.

<sup>10</sup> The scant scholarship exists on the influence of Fabianism in American literature focuses primarily on Gilman's works. The influence of the Webbs carries over into the *American Fabian* (1895-1900) and, I argue, shows its marks on Webster's novels. In "A Rose by Any Other Name: Charlotte Perkins Stetson (Gilman) and the Case for American Reform Socialism," Mark W. Van Wienan notes, though, that there was a key connection between British Fabianism and Gilman. (*American Quarterly* 55, no. 4 [2003]: 617).

a similar epistolary form, they adopt divergent approaches to the ways in which bodies—textual and human—may be molded or rewritten to match Fabian socialist ideologies. In *Daddy-Long-Legs*, Judy Abbott enthusiastically embraces the politics of the Fabian Society as a part of the active and deliberate construction of both her academic and political character. The letters that she writes to her anonymous and unknown benefactor, who has sponsored her college education, become the vehicles through which she creatively experiments with her own political thought and independent identity as she moves away from the orphan asylum, through college, and into adulthood. However, Sallie McBride, who is on the same political course, instead ventriloquizes the Fabian Society's promotion of eugenics, in her professional work as a superintendent to the vulnerable orphans in her asylum. In a seeming contradiction, Sallie's comments about her interest in classifying the orphans effectively damn Judy's agency. Judy, as Judy herself frequently notes, is an orphan of dubious origins.

This chapter shows that Webster's final two fictions dismantle the genre's promise that carefully constructed and highly controlled epistolary techniques provide a disciplined space for regulating the intrusive threat of new bodies of communication and disobedient subjectivities. Instead, the novels, as they turn to the epistle, find that this well-established genre offers space to model Fabian social reform by allowing the heroines to exert full authorial control over their letters. Judy and Sallie find that through reworking epistolary convention, they gain greater freedom to explore their social and political identities because unlike conversations or telephone calls, they may narrate without interruption. In both works, the letter creates a metaphorical body that stands between Judy and Sallie and the men who seek to regulate their behavior. In Judy's case, this figure is her benefactor, Jervis Pendleton. In Sallie's narrative, this authoritative male is her colleague, Dr. McRae. In *Daddy-Long-Legs*, Judy sends her letters as

symbolic repayment for her education, which has been sponsored by her anonymous benefactor. As the novel unfolds, we see her resistance to the passivity that a system of patronage imposes on her. Judy uses her letters to assert control over her writing and challenge her benefactor's influence. Daddy-Long-Legs attempts to keep Judy at an emotional distance while reinforcing that she owes him a significant financial obligation.

By comparison, in *Dear Enemy* technology proves to be the intrusive threat that through her letter writing Sallie seeks to regulate. After Judy's marriage to Daddy-Long-Legs-Jervis-Pendleton between the conclusion of *Daddy-Long-Legs* and the start of *Dear Enemy*, Sallie McBride, Judy's college roommate, arrives at Judy's former orphan asylum as interim superintendent. Eager to abandon her post as soon as a replacement is found and pursue a society marriage with an aspiring politician, Sallie writes letters to a host of correspondents. Her most frequent and passionate letters are to the asylum's doctor, Robin MacRae, an avid proponent of child welfare and eugenics. Dr. MacRae, the "enemy" of the novel's title, soon begins to convince Sallie of the benefits resulting from eugenics, and her ensuing anxiety permeates the letters themselves as she tries to rein in control of both children and letters. In Webster's sequel, telegrams and phone messages, for example, allow information to circulate with increasing rapidity and far less control than the traditional epistolary mode of correspondence. As a consequence, these modern technologies, as Sallie observes, allow impulsively created texts to infiltrate more mediated communication in ways that Webster portrays as disturbing and unregulated. Webster's *Dear Enemy* exploits Sallie's misguided understanding of the epistolary form, which the protagonist erroneously thinks is a genre rooted in familiarity and stability. The novel exposes the fact that Sallie fails to understand that the letter is neither as traditional nor as conservative as she imagines it to be, since many of her letters embody radical political content.

Taken together, *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy*, in their different ways, therefore suggest that the epistle becomes a crucial locus for female voice and political agency. In these works, the focus on epistolarity—a narrative form that by the 1910s appeared very old-fashioned—makes the form an excellent vehicle for mediating progressive Fabian ideas. In other words, Fabianism in these popular books gains a palatable quality through epistolarity’s supposedly traditional and unthreatening framework. In both *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy* the epistle emerges as a narrative form that can transform into a medium for revolution (though of course Fabians do not revolt on principle). Rather like Fabian politics, the well-established practices of epistolarity undergo considerable reform. The transformation of this kind of narrative practice bears strong resemblance to the aims of Fabian politics, which wanted to transform established institutions in the name of a more democratic world.

### **Fabianism in the United States and at Vassar College**

Although *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy* share a similar epistolary form, they adopt divergent approaches to the ways in which bodies—textual and human—may be molded or rewritten to match Fabian socialist ideals. In *Daddy-Long-Legs*, Judy Abbott enthusiastically embraces the politics of the Fabian Society as a part of the active and deliberate construction of both her academic and political character. The letters that she writes to her anonymous and unknown benefactor, who has sponsored her college education, become the vehicles through which she creatively experiments with her own political thought and independent identity as she moves away from the orphan asylum, through college, and into adulthood. That she settles on Fabianism as her particular brand of socialism ties Judy into a complicated transatlantic history

of Fabian socialism. As noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, Evelyn Sharp's story "The Country of Nonamia" reflected the clear influence of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), which had early and lasting influence on Fabian thinkers. The Fabian Society's American influences and origins extend beyond the Transcendentalists and into economic and political theorists. In Edward Pease's *History of the Fabian Society*, he spends the early chapters of his account identifying specific American writers whose work set the stage for the Fellowship of the New Life and, later, the Fabian Society. He addresses the impact of writing by Henry George (1839-1897):

Henry George proposed to abolish poverty by political action: that was the new gospel which came from San Francisco in the early eighties. "Progress and Poverty" was published in America in 1879, and its author visited England at the end of 1881. Socialism hardly existed at that time in English-speaking countries, but the early advocates of land taxation were not then, as they usually are now, uncompromising individualists. "Progress and Poverty" gave an extraordinary impetus to the political thought of the time. It proposed to redress the wrongs suffered by the working classes as a whole: the poverty it considered was the poverty of the wage workers as a class, not the destitution of the unfortunate and downtrodden individuals. It did not merely propose, like philanthropy and the Poor Law, to relieve the acute suffering of the outcasts of civilisation, those condemned to wretchedness by the incapacity, the vice, the folly, or the sheer misfortune of themselves or their relations. It suggested a method by which wealth would correspond approximately with worth; by which the reward of labour would go to those that laboured; the idleness alike of rich and poor would



cease; the abundant wealth created by modern industry would be distributed with something like fairness and even equality, amongst those who contributed to its production.<sup>11</sup>

Though Pease proceeds to dismantle George's economic theories—especially those related to land value tax—the influence of “Progress and Poverty” on early Fabian discourse is clear. Pease later explains that George's ideas and his article circulated as a result of Pease's acquaintance with Scottish-American philosopher Thomas Davidson (1840-1900): “Thomas Davidson was the occasion rather than the cause of the founding of the Fabian Society. His socialism was ethical and individual rather than economic and political.”<sup>12</sup> The transatlantic exchange of ideas was crucial for the formation and promulgation of Fabianism. That is not to suggest, however, that the exchange was always harmonious. The *American Fabian* wasted no time in belittling the Society's English contingent, suggesting that socialism might not withstand nationalist competition: “And your average English Socialist (because he is first of all a Little England-man) is frequently latitudinarian on the subject of English aggression and English superciliousness, and hyper-orthodox regarding the acts and feelings of his American cousin.”<sup>13</sup> Irritation with the English and bitterness toward their government becomes a theme in the *American Fabian*, a tension that could not have helped the fledging branch of the Society establish itself with such demonstrations of American nationalism overshadowing its discussions of socialism.

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<sup>11</sup> Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 26.

<sup>13</sup> [Anon.] “Pleasantries of English Criticism,” *American Fabian* 3, no. 11 (1897): 5. Although unattributed, the article likely is the contribution of W. D. P. Bliss.

Judy's knowledge of Fabianism extends from Webster's encounter with the political movement at Vassar College, where she studied from 1897 to 1901: a period that coincided with the founding of the American branch of the Fabian Society, which holds a very small place in the history of American socialism. Begun in 1897, the American Fabians formed a small coterie of socialists hoping to provide a model that could avoid some of the more violent clashes of socialists in the United States. Mid twentieth-century historian, Margaret Cole, wrote an entire history of Fabian socialism, but in her study the American branch receives only the briefest mention: "The most notable of the originals was the American Fabian Society, which began in Boston under the auspices of one Rev. W. D. P. Bliss, of Boston, who was assisted by J. W. Martin, a member of the London Executive who emigrated; for several years it ran a journal, *The American Fabian*, in Boston and New York, and fathered societies in Philadelphia and San Francisco."<sup>14</sup> Although the *American Fabian* benefited from the contributions of Gilman and Bellamy, the journal, like the American Fabian Society, was short-lived. Swedish historian Henry Bengston, whose work focuses on the labor movements in the United States, particularly among Scandinavian migrants, also notes the lack of traction held by American Fabians: "The [American Fabian Society] was essentially an attempt to transplant the English Fabian Society on American soil, but it never won any of the popularity of the mother organization."<sup>15</sup> Certainly, in light of Pease's account, British Fabians and their short-lived American counterparts mutually regarded each other with a mixture of interest and antipathy.

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<sup>14</sup> Margaret Cole, *The Story of Fabian Socialism* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1961), 347.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Bengston and Michael Brook, *On the Left in America: Memoirs of the Scandinavian-American Labor Movement*, trans. Kermit B. Westerberg (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 21.

By the time of the publication of *Daddy-Long-Legs*, the American Fabian Society had already reached the apex of its American popularity—never significant even at its peak—and had begun to dwindle, in spite of the involvement of the prominent and popular Bellamy and Gilman, who remain its most famous members. Mark Pittenger, who has done extensive research on the confluence of American socialism and evolutionary thought, frames his discussion of the American Fabians with Gilman’s contributions:

After attending the 1896 International Socialist and Labor Congress in England and there meeting members of the Fabian Society, Gilman also became a regular contributor to the *American Fabian*, which reprinted “Similar Cases” in 1897.

That Gilman would gravitate to the American Fabian movement after nationalism collapsed is not surprising. A group of intellectuals located primarily in East and West Coast cities, the Fabians shared Gilman’s distaste for Marxism and her evolutionary faith. They followed Bellamy and Gronlund in seeing every new trust in real estate or grain warehousing as an example of the evolutionary drift toward municipal and state socialism. Articles in the *American Fabian* argued against the importance of struggle in nature (one author found in “floral altruism” the basic for collectivism at all levels of the organic world), predicted the ascendancy of an “aristocracy of the mind,” and insisted upon the benign and “distinctly evolutionary” character of socialism. Stressing intellectual enlightenment and opposed to political or working-class activism, American Fabians shared the tendency of chastened fin-de-siècle socialists like Gronlund to

elevate education over politics—a tendency that fit well with Gilman’s intellectual predilections.<sup>16</sup>

Webster fits Pittenger’s profile of the Fabian as an urban intellectual whose interest in evolutionary development would dovetail with her eventual interest in eugenics. In America, unlike Britain, Pittenger observes: “Fabianism was at best a tiny and transitional movement that linked Bellamy nationalism to the Socialist party.”<sup>17</sup> With little attention and less fanfare, American Fabianism was extremely limited in its reach. The failure of a single, unified socialist party to penetrate mainstream U.S. politics had far-reaching implications as it left social justice to the indulgence of private individuals or charitable organizations, such as orphan asylums. In his study of the American orphanage, Matthew A. Crenson writes: “In the absence of a strong socialist party bent on class struggle or a strong bureaucratic state intent on consolidating its authority and rationalizing society, influence over American social policy fell to the country’s existing charitable institutions.”<sup>18</sup>

Webster’s contact with Fabian socialism, then, was somewhat unusual at the time. In 1897, Webster arrived at Vassar, where she would remain as an active student and writer until her graduation in 1901. Among her friends, she counted future poet Adelaide Crapsey (1878-1914) with whom she entered the political life of the college. Webster eagerly participated in drawing attention to the political movement with Crapsey after the former returned to college.

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Pittenger, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 75-76.

<sup>17</sup> Pittenger, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920*, 77.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew A. Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 27.

Crapsey's biographer, Karen Alkalay-Gut, notes that Webster and Crapsey achieved certain notoriety for their political allegiances both at school and in their families:

The return of Jean doubled the membership of the Socialist party at Vassar and Crapsey and Webster threw themselves into the national election. Sam, Webster's brother, recalled the family reaction to Adelaide and Jean's brand of politics. "We read in the papers that the Vassar girls had held a political rally, and two girls carried the Socialist banner reading 'Vote for Debs.' My mother commented, 'That shows what kind of homes they came from.' But the next day, Jean wrote enthusiastically, 'We had a wonderful rally, and Adelaide Crapsey and I carried the Socialist banner.'"<sup>19</sup>

Yet Webster's embrace of socialism resulted as much from an exposure to American Fabianism as its British counterpart. Both Webster's and Crapsey's introduction to the Fabians came from the founders themselves. During the women's education at Vassar, Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb visited the college in an informal capacity as guests of Herbert E. Mills, a prominent economist and Vassar professor. The Webbs presented an informal lecture, "The Scope of Democracy in England," to the attendees.<sup>20</sup> For Webster, her interest in socialism extended beyond the Vassar election into her academic work. In 1901, she wrote her senior paper on "The Socialism of William Morris." In this instance, she appears to have shared political ideologies with Crapsey not only as an activist; Crapsey also spent her senior year seriously considering the value and future of socialism. As Alkalay-Gut observes:

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<sup>19</sup> Karen Alkalay-Gut, *Alone in the Dawn: The Life of Adelaide Crapsey* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 100.

<sup>20</sup> Alkalay-Gut, *Alone in the Dawn*, 92-93.

That year Crapsey concentrated on her senior thesis, which was concerned with the history, composition, and future of the Socialist party. Although a sincere adherent to the party, she was also able to use some of the perspective of her humor in analyzing its flaws and revealed her objectivity in her awareness of its limitations. Her thesis points out, for example, the extent to which socialism concentrated on criticism of the present and ignored future plans, as if they were doomed to remain a minor, powerless group of gadflies. Her own vision was further-reaching, and she noted “that very little is said of fresh evils to which socialism might give rise, as for instance, political corruption.” There were insufficient leaders in the party, the party had a tendency to “a glib use of catch words, a meaningless array of statistics and an hysterical denunciation of everything in existence” and it had a propensity toward vulgarity which was “a particularly grave [fault] when it can be brought against a party whose avowed aim is to exert an uplifting and educated influence on those with whom it comes into contact.”

These faults were forgivable in a youthful party and could be outgrown. Their consequence, however, was that Crapsey could not immerse herself wholeheartedly in the Socialist party and kept at an academic distance, despite her sympathies. Her ultimate belief was that the Socialist party itself would not change the world, but elements of socialism would infiltrate into the public realm of politics in general.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Alkalay-Gut, *Alone in the Dawn*, 101.

The infiltration rather than overthrow of socialism draws directly from the Fabian model, yet Webster appears to have held on to her socialist political identity longer than Crapsey. Webster's socialist politics remained firmly in place into her adulthood, as do those of *Daddy-Long-Legs*' heroine, Judy, and in Sallie's socialist fascination with eugenics in *Dear Enemy*.

Without suffrage but armed with political conviction, Webster's protagonists find that letters become a space where they can exert political, as well as personal, agency. For Webster, epistolarity acts as an integral device in both fictions. In *Daddy-Long-Legs*, epistolarity allows the orphan Judy to develop her own voice and identity.<sup>22</sup> In *Dear Enemy*, by contrast, Sallie writes to known recipients and must therefore moderate her tone and content in consideration of to whom she pens her epistles. She has neither Judy's freedom nor Judy's burdens. Undeniably, Sallie has an enormous desire to enact positive social reform in the orphan asylum. But she must navigate the troubling contradictions of a brand of Fabian socialism that simultaneously advances the belief, on the one hand, that social injustice results from institutional practices and, on the other hand, the newly popular idea that suffering might be a consequence of hereditary determinism. Just as Judy cannot reconstruct her own heredity as an abandoned child, Sallie cannot determine the ancestry or hereditary markers of the vast majority of her charges, whose various physical and emotional illnesses plague the asylum and the orphans' hopes for adoption. Written three years apart, these novels work through epistolary frameworks that set in opposition two very different Fabian political concerns: first, the primacy of individual agency, especially for women, which letters permit them to exert; and secondly, the role that hereditary determination plays in a world requiring democratic reform and how this anxiety expresses itself through letter writing.

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<sup>22</sup> Anne Bower, *Epistolary Responses: The Letter in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century American Fiction and Criticism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997).

## Agency through Authorship and Literary Adaptation

In my previous chapter on Nesbit's writings, I argued that childhood agency had a critical link in *The Enchanted Castle* with children's abilities to adapt and inhabit different genres of popular fiction. In *Daddy-Long-Legs*, the young adult woman, too, asserts her right to engage with and even modify existing and established narratives in order to more fully own her right as intellectual to shape, alter, and modify. As she begins to discover classic literature, Judy Abbott, drunk on the adventure stories of Stevenson, writes to Daddy-Long-Legs: "I want to see the whole world. I am going to some day—I am, really, Daddy, when I get to be a great author, or artist, or actress, or playwright—or whatever sort of great person I turn out to be. I have a terrible wanderthirst; the very sight of a map makes me want to put on my hat and take an umbrella and start."<sup>23</sup> Webster's heroine remarks frequently on her wonder and curiosity about the outside world, and yet Judy, with her asylum upbringing and little means, builds these ideas of travel and the external world largely from isolated reading and study. Importantly, this signals a departure from "Blue Wednesday," the novel's introduction, when Jerusha could not even imagine an ordinary home. As epistles by definition rely on the immediacy and intimacy of a first-person narrator, Judy repeatedly exercises the opportunity, through her letters, not only to create herself as the writer each time, but also to adopt and adapt the voices and characters of various personages in literature.

Fabian socialism, at its very core, is about reforming existing order, which is exactly what Judy proceeds to do in a series of literary adaptations within her letters. In the process of these adoptions and adaptations, Judy recreates classical works and stories, imbuing characters with a feminist and socialist sensibility. Reading Shakespeare for the first time, Judy delightedly

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<sup>23</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 171-72.



informs Daddy-Long-Legs that she has decided to embody (with her voice as well as the letter itself) Ophelia:

At present I'm Ophelia—and such a sensible Ophelia! I keep Hamlet amused all the time, and pet him and scold him and make him wrap up his throat when he has a cold. I've entirely cured him of being melancholy. The King and Queen are both dead—an accident at sea; no funeral necessary—so Hamlet and I are ruling Denmark without any bother. We have the kingdom working beautifully. He takes care of the governing, and I look after the charities. I have just founded some first-class orphan asylums. If you or any of the other Trustees would like to visit them, I shall be pleased to show you through. I think you might find a great many helpful suggestions.<sup>24</sup>

With this authorial assertion, Judy molds the epistle to contain *Hamlet*, but one that engages with an Ophelia liberated from madness and empowered to enact social reform. The revisionism reunites Ophelia's body with a steady female mind and sensibility—Judy's. Ophelia revives and Judy instructs Daddy-Long-Legs on how to be a feminist reader. By signaling Ophelia's empowerment, she affirms her own. Judy couches her reform in a domestic scene that quickly progresses from colds to orphan asylums. The revision of her imagining, she suggests, could provide real models of change. When Judy reads *Jane Eyre* she writes to Daddy-Long-Legs as her benefactor: "I am not intimating that the John Grier Home was like the Lowood Institute. We had plenty to eat and plenty to wear, sufficient water to wash in, and a furnace in the cellar. But there was one deadly likeness. Our lives were absolutely monotonous and uneventful."<sup>25</sup> The

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<sup>24</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 134-35.

<sup>25</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 152.

criticism, framed with the intimacy of a confessional letter, allows Judy an even greater permissiveness. Here, she connects literature with real-life institutional reform, focusing on the shortcomings in both. The reference to the Lowood Institute allows her to critique the orphan asylum by iterating that the John Grier Home only provided the most basic necessities. The discussion has echoes of Sharp's "The Country of Nonamia" in which it is neither enough to have a foundation nor a castle in the air as one requires both necessity and hope and opportunity in order to build a decent life. Judy finds a way to incorporate and reimagine the institution of her childhood, which allows her to regain control over the John Grier Home and reform it. The repeated but clever epistolary presentation allows her to continually reinforce to her trustee-recipient that change is sorely needed.

Webster also explores the limits that society places on women through Judy's dialogue with fiction. Significantly, Judy creates this dialogue precisely while failing to have a dialogue with Daddy-Long-Legs. When Judy comes across the works of Samuel Pepys during her senior year of college, she re-examines literature and the presentation of gender roles. She begins with a playful salutation and quotation out of Pepys and then observes: "Samuel was as excited by his clothes as any girl; he spent five times as much on dress as his wife—that appears to have been the Golden Age of husbands."<sup>26</sup> In this passage, Judy slyly aligns Pepys' language, clearly outdated and overwrought to a contemporary audience, with the sermon from the visiting preacher from Georgia. Judy's epistles become, implicitly, a forum for her to accrue her education and engage it with modern political discourse as a capable citizen. Her reading encompasses a wide range of classical and popular texts and the reference to Pepys also gives her the opportunity to engage with and deconstruct contemporary social norms. When she comments

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<sup>26</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 267.

that Pepys “was as excited by his clothes as any girl” and then praises his era as “the Golden Age of husbands,” she demonstrates her willing embrace of more fluid gender performance and even equates Pepys’ love of clothes with desirability rather than modeling her response on a more rigid and traditional view of masculinity. She may not have a government-recognized right to political opinion and representation, but in her letters she determines form, style, and voice. Daddy-Long-Legs sends Judy to college to receive an education, but Judy in turn educates Daddy-Long-Legs-Jervis through her relation to the literature she reads on the non-material struggles of life as an orphan and the injustice of being relegated to the status of a quasi-citizen with few political rights because of one’s gender. Occasionally Judy evokes her gender as something less than Judy, letter-writer, such as when she writes: “This isn’t Jerusha Abbott, the future great author, writing to you. It’s just Judy—a girl.”<sup>27</sup> By the end of the novel though, she is not “just Judy,” but a published author, and an educated woman of independent means who has started to reimburse her benefactor, correcting the potential imbalance of power in their relationship. The letters are as much about Jervis’ education as they are about Judy’s development, which is why, as Bower has noted, the film adaptations make changes that strip the book of its political ambition: “Thus, in the 1931 [film] version of Webster’s story, the heroine has no vocational, artistic, or intellectual goals; no voiced interest in earning her own way; no pride in personal achievement; and hardly an opinion on any topic.”<sup>28</sup>

When Judy begins formally considering her political identity, she begins with college elections, but gradually starts considering her political stance as an American, even though—as Judy is quick to point out—she does not yet have the vote. After spending her Christmas

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<sup>27</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 163.

<sup>28</sup> Bower, *Epistolary Responses*, 106.

holidays with Julia, a wealthy college classmate, Judy writes scathingly of the materialism and disconnectedness the family displays from social injustice. The only notable exception is Jervis:

Julia's mother says he's unbalanced. He's a Socialist—except, thank Heaven, he doesn't let his hair grow and wear red ties. She can't imagine where he picked up his queer ideas; the family have been Church of England for generations. He throws away his money on every sort of crazy reform, instead of spending it on such sensible things as yachts and automobiles and polo ponies. He does buy candy with it though! He sent Julia and me each a box for Christmas.

You know, I think I'll be a Socialist, too. You wouldn't mind, would you, Daddy? They're quite different from Anarchists; they don't believe in blowing people up. Probably I am one by rights; I belong to the proletariat. I haven't determined yet just which kind I am going to be. I will look into the subject over Sunday, and declare my principles in my next.<sup>29</sup>

The distinction between socialism and anarchy was one Fabians were keen to explain, even producing Shaw's "The Impossibilities of Anarchism," Fabian tract no. 45 (discussed in chapter 1). As Judy knows, she has the ability to constantly reinvent herself: as correspondent, *New Woman*, college student, proletarian, or even as a fanciful Russian exile. Her political association remains an identity she herself can select without having a label applied to her. In the novel, Judy's choice to identify as a Fabian socialist marks her decision to become a political citizen, regardless of her legal right to cast a ballot.

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<sup>29</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 214-15.

## **“I’m a socialist, please remember”: Reform through Epistolarity in *Daddy-Long-Legs***

Though almost wholly an epistolary novel, *Daddy-Long-Legs* opens with “Blue Wednesday”: a dreary account of Jerusha’s (later Judy’s) struggle to prepare and manage the children during the monthly trustee visit to the John Grier Home. The opening operates first as a literary device to add verisimilitude to the story, in place of the genre’s traditional opening epistle testifying to the veracity of the letters’ tale. Voiced by an omniscient third-person narrator, “Blue Wednesday” briefly intervenes to show the reader how Judy must be and become the self that embodies both Judy, who produces the letters, and Jerusha, aspiring authoress who, by the narrative’s final letter, is on her way to selling an account of her life as a novel. Even in this introduction, *Daddy-Long-Legs* highlights the problems of organizations operating on charity rather than state welfare: “The Trustees and the visiting committee had made their rounds, and read their reports, and drunk their tea, and now were hurrying home to their own cheerful firesides, to forget their bothersome little charges for another month.”<sup>30</sup> Presented in this format, the third-person omniscient narrator becomes the witness that replaces the prefatory epistle or author’s preface common to eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century epistolary fiction. Through this presentation, the narrator reinforces that the orphans, including Judy, are, until her selection for college, afterthoughts, recipients of charity rather than active agents. The tone then shifts to the tragic orphan trope that comments on what Jerusha cannot imagine: “Poor, eager, adventurous little Jerusha, in all her seventeen years, had never stepped inside an ordinary house; she could not picture the daily routine of those other human beings who carried on their

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<sup>30</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 5.

lives undiscommoded by orphans.”<sup>31</sup> Physically and socially little and belittled, marked as other than ordinary, and clearly a dependent on the charity of others, Judy is as thoroughly stripped of her agency as she might be by “the oppressive fact of a Trustee.”<sup>32</sup>

Judy has so far neither first-person narrative control of the text nor any independence as a ward of the asylum. Moreover, her career has been chosen for her and she must pursue work as a writer in exchange for the not inconsiderable expense of her education. In “Blue Wednesday,” Jerusha learns that she will not receive her scholarship to college for academic merit or good conduct, but rather for the express purpose of developing as a writer. The ornery head of the asylum, Mrs. Lippett, says: “[The trustee] believes that you have originality, and he is planning to educate you to become a writer.”<sup>33</sup> Before the reader even reaches the second title page “The Letters of Miss Jerusha Abbott to Daddy-Long-Legs Smith,” Mrs. Lippett’s informs Jerusha that her future beyond the John Grier Home requires that she compose regular letters to anonymous trustee “Mr. Smith,” to detail her educational progress and to improve her writing. Judy (née Jerusha) must develop into a writer not out of personal impetus but also out of necessity. In this sense, Daddy-Long-Legs simultaneously attempts to create Jerusha Abbott, professional author, while unintentionally providing Judy, letter-writer, with the agency to choose how she writes through his lack of reciprocity. As Mrs. Lippett explicitly states, the obligation is all Jerusha’s since Jerusha is the recipient of charity: “He will never answer your letters, nor in the slightest particular take any notice of them. He detests letter-writing, and does not wish you to become a

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<sup>31</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 13.

burden.”<sup>34</sup> Jerusha cannot change the system of epistolary payment for her education. Thus, instead, as a true future Fabian, she reforms the system.

When the novel transitions from “Blue Wednesday” to the “Letters of Miss Jerusha Abbott to Daddy-Long-Legs Smith,” Judy wrests control of the narrative. Rather than appear the specter of orphanhood and poverty, she becomes a fully autonomous agent. The relationship between agency and epistolarity has been thoroughly discussed, particularly in connection with the eighteenth century, which was the epoch of the epistolary novel. Frances Ferguson observes: “Advice on letter writing similarly combines injunctions to you (1) to be yourself and (2) to find out from someone else how to be yourself.”<sup>35</sup> Webster’s novel clearly works against the traditional advice on letter-writing mentioned by Ferguson. Judy cannot, in fact, find out from someone else how to be herself. *Daddy-Long-Legs* makes an interesting innovation, I would contend, in the genre by having Judy learn to know and express herself because of the very lack of reciprocity involved in her correspondence. Judy uses the letters as a form of self-invention. Having escaped institutionalization, Jerusha chooses to become Judy and quickly begins to craft letters in which, freed from the orphan asylum, she explores how to shape herself through her education. Simultaneously, she has the ability invent the identity of her benefactor as she retains full control over her one-sided letter writing. The correspondence mimics their social standing—Judy has obligation to provide the labor (her writing) from which Daddy-Long-Legs benefits. In return, Judy’s education is funded, as well as room and board, but she has no choice in where she receives her education or what major she will choose. She can at least control the content of her letters. Interestingly, Judy’s letters represent a divergence from traditional letter writing in that

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<sup>34</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Frances Ferguson, “The Unfamiliarity of Familiar Letters,” in *The State of the Language* ed. Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 79.

instead of focusing on domestic solitude, Judy writes of sororal companionship and her college education. In its earliest iterations, the epistolary novel was intimately tied to the cult of female distress in the sentimental novel. That genre recognized that a woman's ability to survive and thrive was almost always innately tied to the need to please male recipients. Ruth Perry connects the epistolary novel genre with the need to satisfy and adapt: "Letters were the perfect vehicle for women's highly developed art of pleasing, for in writing letters it is possible to tailor a self on paper to suit the expectations and desires of the audience."<sup>36</sup> The Fabian epistle has less interest in suiting the audience than it does with reforming its recipient. In writing the letters per her scholarship's stipulation, Judy pleases, but since she receives no direction or commentary that would necessitate shaping her responses for her audience, she has unparalleled freedom to share her anxieties and frustration with social injustice both in the world and in her correspondence.

Judy exploits the one-sided nature of her correspondence by mixing intimate address with a scathing critique of the work of her own benefactor. She efficiently attacks the very arbitrary, unknown charity on which she relies. In a letter in which she addresses her recipient several times as the shortened "Daddy," emphasizing a close, familial relationship, she excoriates asylum life and its various indignities but also draws attention to the skewed power dynamic between them:

I hope that I don't hurt your feelings when I criticize the home of my youth?  
But you have the upper hand, you know, for if I become too impertinent, you can  
always stop payment on your checks. That isn't a very polite thing to say—but  
you can't expect me to have any manners; a foundling asylum isn't a young  
ladies' finishing school.

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<sup>36</sup> Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 69.



You know, Daddy, it isn't the work that is going to be hard in college. It's the play. Half the time I don't know what the girls are talking about; their jokes seem to relate to a past that every one but me has shared. I'm a foreigner in the world and I don't understand the language. It's a miserable feeling. I've had it all my life. At the high school the girls would stand in groups and just look at me. I could *feel* "John Grier Home" written on my face. And then a few charitable ones would make a point of coming up and saying something polite. *I hated every one of them*—the charitable ones most of all.<sup>37</sup>

The shortened "Daddy" plays off a relationship that positions Judy as both a child and financial dependent of her patron, but the term is a tactic to impose intimacy even as the letter recounts the ostracism imposed by her institutionalization as a child. The letter directly addresses the uneven power dynamic, which lies entirely with the plutocrats in a system of charity and benevolence. Her argument also constructs a way out of accountability. As Judy points out, since she is someone never educated socially, how much accountability does she have for her manners?<sup>38</sup> She reiterates this point several times throughout the novel.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 36-7.

<sup>38</sup> Judy's phrasing here also evokes Thomas More's *Utopia* (1518): "For if you suffer your people to be ill-educated, and their manners to be corrupted from their infancy, and then punish them for those crimes to which their first education disposed them, what else is to be concluded from this, but that you first make thieves and then punish them?" Thomas More, *Utopia*, 1518, Reprint, Rockville: Arc Manor, 2008, accessed 13 April 2015, <https://books.google.com/books?id=ipyXYA8VjB4C&printsec=frontcover&dq=thomas+more+utopia&hl=en&sa=X&ei=hZdQVdj5A4uwogTi8YDQCg&ved=0CC4Q6wEwAw#v=onepage&q=thomas%20more%20utopia&f=false>.

<sup>39</sup> Judy falls ill and writes an unusually direct and aggressive letter castigating Daddy-Long-Legs for his refusal to answer her letters. She quickly follows up the missive with a letter offering apologies and an explanation: "Please forgive me for being impertinent and ungrateful. I was badly brought up" (Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 69).

Equally important, Judy uses the intimacy of the letter to consider her isolation and its relationship with her standing in a system of Christian benevolence. Webster's novel transparently draws attention to the problematic relationship between systems of charity and widespread poverty. In Judy's experience, philanthropists and ministers build charitable works on a rubric of ongoing poverty. Christians that wish to express charity must have people on whom to enact their benevolence. Given the hierarchal system in which Judy has to endure the receiving of charity for her own survival, only once ensconced at college is she safe to critique the model. Later she will learn that Jervis' impulses were socialist and not Christian in nature, but she takes an enormous gamble by attacking the system of charity that currently supports her. In the same letter as above, she adds a belated postscript in which she reflects on the faults in a Christian system of charity that keeps the poor impoverished:

I forgot to mail this yesterday so I will add an indignant postscript. We had a bishop this morning, and *what do you think he said?*

"The most beneficent promise made us in the Bible is this, 'The poor ye have always with you.' They were put here in order to keep us charitable."

The poor, please observe, being a sort of useful domestic animal. If I hadn't grown into such a perfect lady, I should have gone up after service and told him what I thought.<sup>40</sup>

Judy maintains the pretense that she has family in California in order to deflect the label of a charity student and the John Grier Home, a name that, for Judy, represents all the oppressions of her childhood. Complicating Judy's relationship with Daddy-Long-Legs in particular is his ongoing anonymity. Even as her benefactor's silence gives Judy the space and sanction to direct

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<sup>40</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 38.

and shape the entire narrative, it also puts her at a marked disadvantage. When Daddy-Long-Legs shows up, he does so in the guise of his public self, Jervis Pendleton. Though Jervis' deception allows Judy to meet him as a supposed equal (not knowing his identity as her patron, she obscures her own history from Jervis), Judy nearly abandons their affair out of shame at her asylum upbringing. Both characters participate in a larger, more complex system of charities in the period. Delving into the motivations and economic realities of charitable donations in Victorian England, Sarah Flew argues that the large number of anonymous donations reflect giving more driven by personal sentiment or religious conviction than public prestige:

“Anonymity, therefore, can be viewed as a tool that can be used both to hide identity and to communicate identity. This is nicely crystallized in the form of the pseudonym chosen by an individual in 1860 who gave the sum of 10 shillings to the London City Mission under the description ‘A Friend to Humanity.’”<sup>41</sup> Building on Flew's article, I argue that in Webster's novel such friends of humanity thus hold dual positions of power—the power to patronize in a socially stratified country and to withhold their identities and their objects. Judy's own identity is withheld from her by virtue of being an orphan and thus cannot be recovered.

Rather than gratitude, Judy frequently lapses into frustration or suspicion, wanting to draw a response from Daddy-Long-Legs. For her the offense is the indifference of the charity: “SIR: You never answer any questions; you never show the slightest interest in anything I do. You are probably the horriddest one of all those horrid Trustees, and the reason you are educating me is, not because you care a bit about me, but from a sense of Duty.”<sup>42</sup> Much like the heroines

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<sup>41</sup> Sarah Flew, “Unveiling the Anonymous Philanthropist: Charity in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20, no. 1 (March 2015): 33.

<sup>42</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 67.

of Sharp's fairy tales, Judy does not see obligation itself as sufficient motivation. To borrow the words of Sharp's *Little Princess*, there should be love in it. Similar not only to Sharp but also Nesbit, Webster consistently suggests the importance of charity to forward social justice, not to fulfill a sense of *noblesse oblige*. The characters in all of their works who enact significant social change have emotional ties to the very people they wish to assist. Put more bluntly, they argue that the poor should be human rather than reduced to a problem to be fixed. Even Sallie in *Dear Enemy* writes with disgust of one charitable visit: "Interrupted here to show a benevolent lady over the institution. She asked fifty irrelevant questions, took up an hour of my time, then finally wiped away a tear and left a dollar for my 'poor little charges.'"<sup>43</sup> Fabian writing for children and young adults, by extension, ameliorates socialism with a more traditional humanism.

Letters become the conduit for Judy to establish not just a charitable connection but also a potent emotional relationship with the recipient consuming her writing. In her article on the stage and film adaptations of *Daddy-Long-Legs*, Anne Bower recognizes the critical loss of agency that happens when the novel's epistolarity is translated into other media: "*Daddy-Long-Legs* is also the story of female triumph over adversity. Webster's decision to present the novel in letters gives the protagonist extra power to shape her life and her chronicle. When the letter form is removed, self-empowerment goes with it, to a large extent."<sup>44</sup> The epistolarity that is so crucial to Judy's agency must by extension then be regarded as a structure that should eventually end with Judy's full incorporation into society, for the letters themselves also represent her

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<sup>43</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 28.

<sup>44</sup> Anne Bower, *Epistolary Responses: the Letter in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Criticism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 99.

financial obligation and isolation that requires addressing. As Perry in her work on epistolarity observes:

The isolation of the characters is essential to the epistolary formula because it throws the characters back into themselves, to probe their own thoughts, their own feelings. Their separation from others inevitably magnifies their reactions, makes them vulnerable and suggestible, and provides a steady flow of responses to record. What the characters enact in their seclusion is at the core of the epistolary novel: a self-conscious and self-perpetuating process of emotional self-examination which gathers momentum and ultimately becomes more important than communicating with anyone outside the room in which one sits alone writing letters.<sup>45</sup>

What makes *Daddy-Long-Legs* particularly interesting is how it departs from the tradition of the epistolary genre as one largely contained to the domestic space and relocates the letter-writer and content to a college campus. Where the girls boarding school novel began, the college epistolary novel continues. *Daddy-Long-Legs* represents a metamorphosis in the genre, one accompanied by a specific, driven political consciousness that drives much of the social critique. Even the romance, though the most commented on portion of the novel, has a socialist millionaire marrying the newly financially independent and gainfully employed writer, Judy. Bower, too, notes that Webster constructs her novel in a way that allows it to engage politically and intellectually with less domestic material: “Making her heroine an aspiring author and enthusiastic college student makes it logical that the letters in *Daddy-Long-Legs* can contain not only news of studies and campus events but also reflections on women’s suffrage and education,

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<sup>45</sup> Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, 117.

the class system, the pitfalls of fundamentalist religions, and the foolishness of overauthoritarian professors and administrators.”<sup>46</sup> Though some commentary does involve apartment furnishings and the milliner, Judy’s primary interests and concerns repeatedly tie back to her own desire to improve the life of orphans like herself.

*Daddy-Long-Legs* is both fundamentally Fabian and constantly moving toward a more aggressive form of female agency and socialism. As the novel progresses, Judy makes more indirect epistolary reforms in order to make her own decisions about how to spend summer vacation from college. When charm and polite requests are rebuffed after her sophomore year, Judy realizes that she can manipulate the letter’s exigencies for her own benefit. Realizing that delaying her letter also means delaying its arrival, Judy posts her letter requesting Daddy-Long-Legs’ approbation for her plans too late for him to catch her even by telegram. When she does belatedly, as planned, receive his angry missive, she calmly suggests that he could have played a more active role as a letter recipient, thus shaping her identity as she shapes his:

Now, you see, if you had been a sane, sensible person and had written nice, cheering, fatherly letters to your little Judy, and come occasionally and patted her on the head, and had said you were glad she was such a good girl—Then, perhaps, she wouldn’t have flouted you in your old age, but would have obeyed your slightest wish like the dutiful daughter she was meant to be.<sup>47</sup>

Not only does Judy thus skillfully use the U.S. Post Office as a method of asserting control, Judy’s letter above here also casts Daddy-Long-Legs in the image of the very trustee disdained at the John Grier Home. In an earlier letter, Judy describes this loathed figure: “The Trustee, as

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<sup>46</sup> Bower, *Epistolary Responses*, 97-98.

<sup>47</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 200-01.

such, is fat and pompous and benevolent. He pats one on the head and wears a gold watch chain.”<sup>48</sup> By this moment in the story, Daddy-Long-Legs has shown more personal interest in Judy via the delivery of flowers when she is ill and gifts rather than cash during the holidays. However, as soon as he attempts to control her movements again, Judy adeptly displays her facility with rewriting him into the role of the condescending benefactor. Anne K. Phillips has suggested that Judy’s letters act as a personal diary to track her development.<sup>49</sup> I offer a different interpretation: Judy struggles as she tries to find a unilateral method of production so that she may act as writer and builder of her recipient without the participation of a second party. *Daddy-Long-Legs* introduces the reader to a reformation of the gendered form of epistolary that shows the independent woman moving away from patriarchal male support. Such support represents, first, the power imbalance between genders and, second, the larger problem of the state institutions that seek to regulate bodies like Judy’s. Just as Judy develops her agency through her letters, she also suggests that by ignoring her, Daddy-Long-Legs has enabled her to find a new mode of production, underscored by her depiction of him as old, doting patriarch. Webster’s liberated woman arises from the liberated letter writer. Through the evocation of the trustee, Judy forces Daddy-Long-Legs to be on the receiving end of condescension and offers an unflattering mirror through which to view benevolence. Cleverly, Judy’s negative portrayal of the trustee also implies that she can only enact the part of the obedient orphan if Daddy-Long-Legs fully inhabits his role as pompous trustee. Given that he will not perform according to that script either, Judy does not need to follow suit.

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<sup>48</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 84-85.

<sup>49</sup> Anne Kathryn Phillips, “‘Yours most loquaciously’: Voice in Jean Webster’s *Daddy-Long-Legs*,” *Children’s Literature* 27 (1999): 73.

As my analysis demonstrates, *Daddy-Long-Legs*' epistolary therefore form puts a premium on the Fabian advocacy for individual agency. Through this structure of a unilateral, unreciprocated series of letters, which constitute the bulk of *Daddy-Long-Legs*, Webster employs epistolarity as a conduit through which she can expose the patriarchal imposition of authority. Through this feminist lens, Webster suggests that female agency develops when Judy dissents from her benefactor's instructions to only send news of her scholastic progress. When her benefactor does not respond, Judy recognizes that she may construct her recipient however she chooses, even rewriting Daddy-Long-Legs' gender:

Should you mind, just for a little while, pretending you are my grandmother?  
Sallie has one and Julia and Leonora each two, and they were all comparing them to-night. I can't think of anything I'd rather have; it's such a respectable relationship. So, if you really don't object—When I went into town yesterday, I saw the sweetest cap of Cluny lace trimmed with lavender ribbons. I am going to make you a present of it on your eighty-third birthday.

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Judy acknowledges both the liberty she takes in reconstructing her sponsor's identity and uses that freedom to demonstrate her creative independence while simultaneously emptying a critique of her relationship with Daddy-Long-Legs as clearly unrespectable. In this scenario, Judy posits herself as the gift-giver, a restructuring of the power dynamic so that Judy not only endows someone else with goods, but the fantasy also extends to appropriating a patriarchal structure and molding it into a matriarchal one. Moreover, Judy provides a critique of the skewed power structure, by extension considering metaphors for both religion and authorship: "[I]t is very

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<sup>50</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 32.



humiliating to be picked up and moved about by an arbitrary, peremptory, unreasonable, omnipotent, invisible Providence, still, when a man has been as kind and generous and thoughtful as you have heretofore been toward me, I suppose he has a right to be an arbitrary, peremptory, unreasonable, invisible Providence if he chooses, and so—I'll forgive you and be cheerful again."<sup>51</sup> Judy may forgive Daddy-Long-Legs, but she also points out that in many ways, he acts unjustly as the author of her life and she must repeatedly wrench control of her own narrative back from him.

In *Daddy-Long-Legs*, Judy does not have a body to tie to her imagined recipient and also contends occasionally with an intermediary—Elmer Griggs, secretary to Daddy-Long-Legs. Judy's attempts to use a mediator fail, however, since she refuses to engage with the secretary and instead finds increasing mental distance between her new life and the John Grier Home as well as literally traveling more outside the confines of her known world. Judy finds the lack of embodiment inherent in the epistolary form a freedom from restriction. An orphan, Judy is one of society's unregulated bodies. Judy can and does create narrative spaces for herself, inviting Daddy-Long-Legs to participate but never waiting for him to build such a space for her. Crucial to this permissiveness-through-passivity is, again, the gulf between Daddy-Long-Legs and Jervis Pendleton. Omnipresent in Webster's novel is the possibility that Daddy-Long-Legs, trustee and plutocrat, could respond, suddenly engaging Judy, and, in doing so, exert a control over Judy, whose entire life depends on his benevolence during the majority of the book. Jervis, by creating a separate dialogue with Judy (albeit one that the reader never sees), does not demand responses but requests permission to exchange textual bodies and receives it. Were he to do so as Daddy-Long-Legs with his financial involvement in Judy's life, it would create a textual invasion in

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<sup>51</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 167.

which Judy can never truly have agency. Yet by withholding his identity from Judy, he becomes a cipher. Judy writes: “I’m so awfully lonely. You are the only person I have to care for, and you are so shadowy. You’re just an imaginary man that I’ve made up—and probably the real *you* isn’t a bit like my imaginary *you*.”<sup>52</sup> Authorship itself is fraught with the imposition of identity. Judy spends much of the novel moving away from any identity an association with the John Grier Home would foist upon her. Yet as Judy comes into her own as a writer, control becomes a more difficult thing to wield: “I came up with a pen and tablet hoping to write an immortal short story, but I’ve been having a dreadful time with my heroine—I *can’t* make her behave as I want her to behave; so I’ve abandoned her for the moment, and am writing to you. (Not much relief though, for I can’t make you behave as I want to, either.)”<sup>53</sup> In a metafictional moment, Webster aligns Judy’s development as a writer with her facility as a letter writer. Judy, like Jervis, is unable to wrangle the object of her attention. As a result she must then acknowledge her own limits when it comes to exerting influence over the lives of others, whether a character of her own creation or her mysterious benefactor. The novel shows her steadily moving away from various modes of dependence—charitable, patriarchal, and paternal.

When male voices enter the text via Judy’s mediating narration, she frequently castigates their attempts to lecture or condescend to their subjects. For all Judy’s self-consciousness about her mysterious antecedents and asylum past, she does manage to pass at her women’s college as a peer without anyone ever discovering her secret, except for Jervis, who learned of it through her letters. She alludes to Shakespeare, Dickinson, and Pepys without explanation or self-consciousness. As such, her education becomes less a gift from Daddy-Long-Legs and

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<sup>52</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 166-67.

<sup>53</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 169.

transforms into a body of knowledge over which she feels a sense of confidence and ownership. When a misogynistic minister comes to visit her college, Judy recounts the scene while asserting a literary domination over the event through her literary reference.:

Just back from church—preacher from Georgia. We must take care, he says, not to develop our intellects at the expense of our emotional natures—but methought it was a poor, dry sermon (Pepys again). It doesn't matter what part of the United States or Canada they come from, or what denomination they are, we always get the same sermon. Why on earth don't they go to men's colleges and urge the students not to allow their manly natures to be crushed out by too much mental application?<sup>54</sup>

The passage reveals a great deal of progression from the onset of the novel when Judy fears speaking up and making mistakes or expressing her frustration with knowing little of life outside an asylum. She makes a key rhetorical point that education does not have an inherent masculinity or femininity and satirizes the preacher with Pepys, an empowerment that directly results from her college education. For Webster, socialism, equal access to education, and suffragism have overlapping political goals. Judy introduces, then ameliorates the preacher's injunction to retain her femininity. Daddy-Long-Legs, as clearly is established at the juncture in the novel, will not respond, thus allowing Judy to maintain her feminist stance without fear of financial retribution or contention.

Webster implicitly embraces Sharp's iteration of Fabian socialism far more than Nesbit's as evidenced in Judy's repeated determination to participate fully as a capable citizen. I have talked about how Sharp and Nesbit accord the child significant political agency, and yet women

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<sup>54</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 268.

were infantilized by the detractors of suffrage and, in this sense, Judy fights to be treated as a citizen, too, although she is in early adulthood. When she elects to take economics so that she may influence asylum reform, she triumphantly writes Daddy-Long-Legs: “Don’t you think I’d make an admirable voter if I had my rights? I was twenty-one last week. This is an awfully wasteful country to throw away such an honest, educated, conscientious, intelligent citizen as I would be.”<sup>55</sup> In Webster’s novel, the absence of a parallel set of male epistolary bodies leaves a female epistolary rubric in which no male voice ever trespasses. Essentially, in this unmoderated space Judy can and does assert her rights as citizen and so campaigns for the vote. Even in the prologue, “Blue Wednesday,” the voices—the narrator’s, Judy’s, and Mrs. Lippett’s—all belong to women. To be sure, it is the significance and power of a male figure that sets up the epistolary framework, but the arrangements for Judy’s education are conveyed by a female intermediary, Mrs. Lippett, behind whom a female author operates. Judy identifies this grammatical dilemma in the very same letter in which she turns down an offer, made through Daddy-Long-Legs’ secretary, to send her to Europe for the summer. Judy instead chooses the less pleasurable but far more pragmatic path of beginning to earn her own living. When Judy refuses both Daddy-Long-Legs’ written offer and Jervis’ attempts to convince her to go to Europe,<sup>56</sup> she insists: “The only way I can ever repay you is by turning out a Very Useful Citizen (Are women citizens? I don’t suppose they are).”<sup>57</sup> Closing her letter by announcing that she may very well marry an undertaker and act as his muse, she foregrounds the role of sculpting bodies

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<sup>55</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 205.

<sup>56</sup> Again, the split identity of Daddy-Long-Legs and Jervis shows that one occupies a space of imagination for Judy and the other a physical body to resist, though she can and does resist the attempts of both to force her into a specific course of action.

<sup>57</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 240-41.

and inverts the joke; Daddy-Long-Legs is Judy's muse, and Judy occupies the powerful position of the Pygmalion figure rather than that of a passive Galatea, subject to male desire. Daddy-Long-Legs, as mentioned previously, must suffer his many reinventions at Judy's whim. When Jervis attempts to convince Judy to go to Europe and she refuses, she writes to Daddy-Long-Legs of her rebellion against Jervis' wishes: "I *must* show him that he can't dictate to me. No one can dictate to me but you, Daddy—and you can't always!"<sup>58</sup> Jervis may write, but when he does attempt to dictate instead of engaging in mutual discourse, Judy moves her physical body elsewhere and delivers her epistolary confrontation to Daddy-Long-Legs instead. Framing Jervis in the world of her letter, she exerts her control over the situation and its presentation, permitting privileged access to her interiority. Judy, without realizing it, educates her own suitor Jervis about the significance of financial independence for a young woman and her strong desire to vote and participate fully as an American citizen. An early point made by the austere Mrs. Lippett is that the trustee providing Judy with her education hates girls and repeatedly has shown no interest in educating them. Yet in true Fabian fashion, Judy slowly and carefully reforms Jervis just as she reforms genre.

While no male voice ever overrides or interrupts Judy's narrative, she does engage with male epistolary bodies, though Judy does not divulge the content of these letters to Daddy-Long-Legs. Judy writes: "I have been receiving beautiful long letters this winter from Master Jervie (with typewritten envelopes so Julia won't recognize the writing). Did you ever hear anything so shocking? And every week or so a very scrawly epistle, usually on yellow tablet paper, arrives from Princeton."<sup>59</sup> Exercising command of her letters, she also has the opportunity to frame

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<sup>58</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 244.

<sup>59</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 231.

herself as a recipient, a role that carries specifically feminine connotations: “So you see—I am not so different from other girls—I get mail, too.”<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, the typewriter’s printing allows for standardization and, by extent, anonymity provided via mechanization. When considering Fabian uncertainty about industry and mechanization, it’s interesting that the typewriter enables the collusion of Judy and Jervis as they hide their letters from Julia. In the year of *Daddy-Long-Leg*’s publication, women’s full suffrage still remained eight years away. Yet here, it is Jervis’s identity that must be made anonymous to others while Judy may write openly. Even though Jervis at first uses anonymity as an extension of male control, Judy’s manifold reinventions of Daddy-Long-Legs reform him into the equal she always hoped him to be.

#### **“Unspeakable heredity”: Unregulated Epistolary Bodies and Eugenics in *Dear Enemy***

After the enormous commercial and critical success of *Daddy-Long-Legs* and its theatrical adaptation, Webster set to work on a sequel. Rather than continuing Judy’s narrative, though, Webster instead chose to change heroines. With Judy married to Daddy-Long-Legs, Sallie McBride, Judy’s former college classmate and the privileged daughter of a wealthy industrialist, becomes the new epistolary narrator. *Dear Enemy* quickly became a bestseller after its 1915 publication and garnered numerous favorable reviews. Karen A. Keely, one of the few scholars to work on Webster’s fiction, writes: “The 1915 sequel (and Webster’s last novel before her death in 1916), *Dear Enemy*, had a smaller current audience, but was very popular when

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<sup>60</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 231.

published; it was among the top ten best sellers of 1916.”<sup>61</sup> The novel had enough popularity that it even appeared in a parody piece the following year in *McBride’s Magazine* (the rechristened *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*, which changed names after moving publication to New York City and merging with *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1916). The short piece features three caricatures in conversation in which the Tired Business Man conversing with a Critic and Frivolous Young Person advocates for Webster’s novels: “I suppose all you highbrows will pour vials of scorn on me when I say that I liked ‘Daddy Long Legs’ immensely, and that I waited impatiently for Miss Webster’s new book, ‘Dear Enemy,’ to appear. I’ll stand by my colors, though; and I think I differ from most of you only in that I am man enough to speak out in meeting.”<sup>62</sup> Notably, the parody specifically situates Webster’s novel as popular fiction, ergo not “highbrow” material. The fact that the novel is for girls and focuses on charity—often relegated to the realm of women—suggests that its parodying reflects American society’s belittling of girls and their reading. A man, the joking article implies, should look ridiculous for having an interest in the thoughts of a young woman. Strangely, Watson’s classification of Webster’s works as lowbrow contrasts directly with contemporary reviews, which posit *Dear Enemy* as a serious—even instructional—work on eugenics and orphan asylum reform. A reviewer for the *Atlanta Constitution* enthusiastically endorses the book, like several other contemporary critics, not only as entertainment, but also as a piece of didactic literature for those working on institutional reforms: “Miss Webster made a study of these institutions before she wrote this book about

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<sup>61</sup> Karen A. Keely, “Teaching Eugenics to Children: Heredity and Reform in Jean Webster’s *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy*,” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 28 (2004): 363.

<sup>62</sup> Alaric Watson, “But We Know What We Like: Literary Adventures of Everyday Folk,” *McBride’s Magazine* 97 (1916): 155, accessed 23 April 2015 <http://search.proquest.com/docview/135615506?accountid=14512>.

Sallie and her little charges. A copy of the book should be in the hands of every superintendent of any kind of public institution.”<sup>63</sup> Here, suddenly, the slippage between novel as fiction and novel as instructional text becomes immediately apparent. The novel’s eugenic elements take on extra importance when considering that reviewers and readers saw *Dear Enemy* as a practical manual as much as a work of fiction.

While *Daddy-Long-Legs* dominated bestseller lists across America, the British Eugenics Education Society hosted the first International Eugenics Conference in London. Founded by Sybil Neville-Rolfe, the British Eugenics Education Society “aimed at promoting, in [Francis] Galton’s words, those agencies under social control that would lead to racial improvement. The society had close links with the Committee of the Moral Education League (founded in 1898), whose motto was ‘character is everything.’”<sup>64</sup> Soon after the conference, a plethora of eugenics texts, studies, and novels flooded the book market. They included Meyer Solomon’s “Science and Practice of Eugenics; or Race Culture,” Scott Nearing’s *Super Race: An American Problem*, and Helen Baker’s *Race Improvement, or Eugenics*.<sup>65</sup> Most important, though, were two other books published that year: Havelock Ellis’s *Task of Social Hygiene* (1912) and Henry Goddard’s *Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness* (1912). The two studies brought eugenics to the forefront of public discussion. Ellis, in 1912 a member of the British Eugenics Education Society, had a brief affiliation with London’s Fabian Society during the fin-de-siècle

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<sup>63</sup> “Book Reviews in Tabloid,” *Atlanta Constitution* (7 November 1915): E1, accessed 23 April 2015, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Atlanta Constitution.

<sup>64</sup> Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29.

<sup>65</sup> Eileen Cleere, *The Sanitary Arts: Aesthetic Culture and the Victorian Cleanliness Campaigns* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2014), 142.



and wrote on a wide array of topics that touched on socialist interests. Ellis's book on social hygiene, in particular, joined the discourse of socialism with the discourse of eugenics and argued that the two together might promote a particularly strong strain of individualism.

The debate about the need for individualism amid socialist theory had, for some time, been an urgent topic among intellectual radicals. Wilde argued in the *Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891) that rather than inhibit or limit individual agency, socialism was the political theory to realize greater freedom: "Upon the other hand, Socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism."<sup>66</sup> A notable precursor to Wilde's argument came from a work of Fabian fiction on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. In the United States, American Fabian Bellamy had deep-seated suspicions of individualism as a strain of thought that would detract from socialism. In Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward*, scientist Dr. Leete speaking in the year 2000 of the superior race of humans currently living rather than that of nineteenth-century America, insists that individualism worked in opposition to socialist aims:

Perhaps more important than any of the causes I mentioned then as tending to race purification has been the effect of untrammelled sexual selection upon the quality of two or three successive generations. [...] Individualism, which in your day was the animating idea of society, not only was fatal to any vital sentiment of brotherhood and common interest among living men, but equally to any realization of the responsibility of the living for the generation to follow. To-day this sense of responsibility, practically unrecognized in all previous ages, has become one of the great ethical ideas of the race, reinforcing, with an intense

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<sup>66</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1912), 6.

conviction of duty, the natural impulse to seek in marriage the best and noblest of the other sex.<sup>67</sup>

Nationalism for *Looking Backward* consists of deferring to the health of the state body through its citizens' reproduction. In Bellamy's socialist future, individualism has died ignominiously as a driving political ideology and, as a result, citizens naturally practiced positive eugenics to the benefit of society at large. Ellis, therefore, has the task of uniting a Wildean brand of socialist individualism with a Bellamy-inflected eugenic practice. Socialist reform and an understanding of breeding might preserve the individual as an independent and intellectually liberated figure, one who can and should aspire to genius. Ellis grapples with this problem in the following passage:

In every age the question of Individualism and Socialism takes on a different form. In our own age it has become acute under the form of a conflict between the advocates of good heredity and the advocates of good environment. On the one hand there is the desire to breed the individual to a high degree of efficiency by eugenic selection, favouring good stocks and making the procreation of bad stocks more difficult. On the other hand there is the effort so to organize the environment by collectivist methods that life for all may become easy and wholesome. As usual, those who insist on the importance of good environment are inclined to consider that the question of heredity may be left to itself, and those who insist on the importance of good heredity are indifferent to environment. As usual, also, there is a real underlying harmony of those two demands. There is, however, here more than this. In this most modern of their

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<sup>67</sup> Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1888), 375-76.

embodiments, Socialism and Individualism are not merely harmonious, each is the key to the other, which remains unattainable without it. However carefully we improve our breed, however anxiously we guard the entrance to life, our labour will be in vain if we neglect to adapt the environment to the fine race we are breeding. The best individuals are not the toughest, any more than the highest species are the toughest, but rather, indeed, the reverse, and no creature needs so much and so prolonged an environing care as man, to ensure his survival. On the other hand, an elaborate attention to the environment, combined with a reckless inattention to the quality of the individuals born to live in that environment can only lead to an overburdened social organization which will speedily fall by its own weight.<sup>68</sup>

Ellis' unification of socialist goals with the cause of individualism allows eugenics to occupy what he perceives as a shared common goal. In her work on the social hygiene movement from the Victorian era into the twentieth century, Eileen Cleere notes: "The new era of social reform, in Ellis's opinion, needed to focus on protecting the fit from the unfit, and taking responsibility for the next generation by encouraging rather than ameliorating the necessary work of natural selection as it culled the degenerate, the inebriate, and the feeble from the British gene pool."<sup>69</sup> Cleere's observations reflect that Ellis was a proponent of "positive eugenics," which involves cultivating good heredity in a positive environment so the two can work together in a symbiotic environment. The first major family heredity study in the United States was undertaken by

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<sup>68</sup> Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912), 399-400.

<sup>69</sup> Cleere, *The Sanitary Arts*, 122-23.

Richard L. Dugdale in his research on incarcerated men and ultimately advocated this type of positive eugenics. During his research on prisoners, he discovered that many in New York state had links to the same family. Dugdale researched the family tree and discovered a history of disorders and criminal records. In his discussion of what he terms nervously disordered stock, Dugdale specifically mentions that the numbers must, he infers, be artificially low: “The number tabulated is greatly under the actual facts, because so many are either orphan or abandoned children who know nothing of their ancestry.”<sup>70</sup> Critically, his mention of orphans shows an assumption that they must be not only hereditarily suspect, but also implicitly degenerate. Yet Dugdale advocates the improvement of conditions as a solution rather than assuming nature has predetermined the fate of families like the Jukes.

By contrast, however, Goddard’s book rejects environment as having more than a cursory influence and instead insists on the unavoidability of genetic degeneration thus necessitating, in Goddard’s mind, a policy for negative eugenics, which mandates exiling, sterilizing, or even executing those declared unfit. In his infamous study, *The Kallikak Family*, Goddard declares: “We may now repeat the ever insistent question, and this time we indeed have good hope of answering it. The question is, ‘How do we account for this kind of individual? The answer is in a word, ‘Heredity.’—bad stock. We must recognize that the human family shows varying stocks or strains that are marked and that breed as true as anything in plant or animal life.”<sup>71</sup> Although Goddard strikes a hard line for genetic determination, he does hesitate regarding sterilization. He endorses the state intervention in reproduction, but also acknowledges the limits of such a tactic:

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<sup>70</sup> Richard L. Dugdale, *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1877), 86.

<sup>71</sup> Henry Goddard, *The Kallikak Family* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912), 12.

“At best, sterilization is not likely to be a final solution of this problem. We may, and indeed I believe must, use it as a help, as something that will contribute toward the solution, until we can get segregation thoroughly established.”<sup>72</sup> The American brand of eugenics would become the most aggressive model until the Nazi socialist party began their pursuit of the eugenic state (and their tactics were largely based on American studies and policy during Goddard’s lifetime). Eventually eugenicists divided into two main contingents as noted by historian Donald H. Pickens. He notes: “Thus the scientific community of the nineteenth century contained both environmentalists and hereditarians. The former group stressed education and differences in opportunity and the plasticity of human nature; the latter element emphasized innate character, differential fecundity among the social classes, genetic determinism; and was pessimistic about improvement in human nature.”<sup>73</sup> In short, what is at stake in *Dear Enemy* is at once Sallie’s education in eugenics and the novel’s internal debate between environmentalist and hereditarian schools of thought and, by extension, negative eugenics (often favored by the environmentalists) and positive eugenics (the more popular brand of eugenics with hereditarians).

The dilemma faced by *Dear Enemy*’s protagonist echoes throughout the Fabian Society: having argued for the innate equality of humankind and the possible improvements in society through the amelioration of social conditions, could they now argue that ultimately heredity overruled all social reform? *Dear Enemy*, I argue, is ultimately trapped between two competing brands of eugenics. The juxtaposition of environmentalist and hereditarian approaches helps to clarify several of the paradoxes and inconsistencies found within *Dear Enemy*. In its environmentalist eugenics, the novel operates a place where laws as well as orphans may be

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<sup>72</sup> Goddard, *The Kallikak Family*, 115.

<sup>73</sup> Donald H. Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 39.

reformed through proper nurturing. As a romance, the eventual love and future marriage of Sallie and Sandy represents a hereditarian eugenics where the two healthy individuals will reproduce and, in doing so, provide new, strong citizens for the state of known origin. Angelique Richardson notes that the merging of romantic love with eugenic thought had key connections to fin-de-siècle feminism. She writes:

Eugenic love was the politics of the state mapped onto bodies: the replacement of romance with the rational selection of a reproductive partner in order better to serve the state through breeding. I argue that a number of New Women had a maternalist agenda which, in the context of late nineteenth-century British fears of racial decline and imperial loss, developed as eugenic feminism. The central goal of eugenic feminists was the construction of civic motherhood which sought political recognition for reproductive labour; in the wake of new biological knowledge they argued that their contribution to nation and empire might be expanded if they assumed responsibility for the rational selection of reproductive partners.<sup>74</sup>

Richardson's argument allows us to read *Dear Enemy* as a text invested in a unique type of feminist maternalism—Sallie is a maternal figure in the orphan asylum, thus making her a maternal extension of the state, yet she retains the ability and desire to procreate separately from the institution, thus contributing eugenic bodies for the nation. In her study of eugenics and atavism—a term used in the late nineteenth century to signify the reproduction of ancestral type or inherited disease—Dana Seitler argues that the latter shaped American politics and socio-

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<sup>74</sup> Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century*, 8-9.

economic structures.<sup>75</sup> Building on Seitler's discussion of atavism and maternity, I contend that Sallie represents both institutional and individual maternity, and, what is more, that this is her unique role as a woman superintendent within the eugenics movement.

This section of my chapter focuses on the intellectual war in *Dear Enemy*, between scientific advancement through eugenics and the desire to nurture even those children deemed to suffering from "degeneracy."<sup>76</sup> I discuss Sallie's understanding of atavism in relation to different technologies of communication including the letter, the telegram, and the telephone. The letters in this novel provide a place for the New Woman to explore professional and personal identities, radical educational ideas, and a space in which she may retreat, albeit temporarily, from marriage. Though Sallie may engage routinely with welfare and reform, she also uses epistolary bodies to establish boundaries between herself and her critics.<sup>77</sup> When her fiancé critiques Sallie, she confronts through the letter rather than in person, thus building more distance between them. She eschews the phone and telegram for a more controlled and delayed mode of communication. Rather than rendering epistolary fiction obsolete, works like *Dear Enemy* reinforce the genre's impact for uniting political or revolutionary thought with narrative intimacy. Perhaps the epistolary genre itself might reflect for Sallie a certain atavism: as technology moves relentlessly forward, epistolary fiction provides a refuge but for mutating and perhaps highly suspect bodies.

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<sup>75</sup> Dana Seitler, *Atavistic Tendencies: The Culture of Science in American Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4-5.

<sup>76</sup> The term is one Sallie exasperatingly applies to the doctor's determination to root out and diagnose those with bad heredity. (See Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 128.)

<sup>77</sup> Although the letters that comprise Webster's novel are understood by her readers to be fiction, the intimate, first-person narration afforded by its epistolary form softens the reader to the eugenics platform on which so much of the story rests, as noted by Richardson in *Love and Eugenics in the Nineteenth Century*.

Seitler notes that American Fabian Charlotte Perkins Gilman promoted eugenics through regeneration novel *The Crux* (1911): “[The novel] is a call to arms, a political battle cry that would send mothers into the streets, into the convention halls, to remake nations.”<sup>78</sup> Sallie frequently refers to herself as a mother and the orphans as her “chicks.” She has indeed been sent to remake the nation in that capacity. When Sallie arrives she discovers that she has a number of children that will be difficult to place given their unknown heredity, which makes them suspect as potential adoptees.

Webster, however, clearly demonstrates that “poor breeding” must not become the ultimate determination of success. Sallie moderates and questions some of her own views as a direct result of epistolary exchange. The body of letters with the asylum’s doctor becomes symbolic of the actual exchange that will occur. The doctor—his mentally ill wife having conveniently shed her mad mortal coil—and Sallie decide to marry, though the doctor’s daughter from his first marriage must be overseen at all times by a nurse as she is, as a result of her poor breeding, “abnormal.” *Daddy-Long-Legs* and *Dear Enemy* model a new, Fabian epistolarity in which the letter itself, ultimately recognized as a liberating and highly mutable form, provides the space for social reform. The epistolary novel, in turn, lends its form to the collection of a series of competing opinions (though we only hear these diverging opinions mediated through Sallie’s responses to them) about the orphan body as Sallie constantly looks beyond the orphan asylum. Her letters bring her rapid news from Washington, D.C. where her erstwhile fiancé lives and from Florida where Judy and Jervis vacation. Judy and Sallie find a way to express and explore their political identities, but Sallie’s has a much more direct investment in the value of the healthy human body and the devaluing of humans of “unspeakable heredity.” Through this

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<sup>78</sup> Seitler, *Atavistic Tendencies*, 177.



traditional medium, American Fabianism arrives through highly sophisticated female voices operating outside male constraint. *Daddy-Long-Legs*. Judy embraces this lack of mediation whereas Sallie constantly attempts to assert control over human and epistolary bodies with mixed success.

If *Daddy-Long-Legs* reveals the ways in which Fabian socialist thought empowers Judy to imagine herself as a figure who in every way transcends the traditional literary stereotype of the Oliver Twist orphan figure, *Dear Enemy* pursues an entirely divergent line of Fabian inquiry. The latter encounters eugenic thought in the aftermath of the global organization of American and European eugenicists when they were beginning to make significant headway in political arenas, particularly after the 1912 eugenics conference in London. For all Judy's epistolary agency, Sallie McBride, who is on the same political course in the sequel, *Dear Enemy*, instead ventriloquizes the Fabian Society's promotion of eugenics in her professional work as a superintendent to the vulnerable orphans in her asylum. In a seeming contradiction, Sallie's comments about her interest in classifying the orphans effectively damn Judy's agency. Judy, as she herself frequently notes, is an orphan of dubious origins and she mocks a wealthy friend's attempts to extract a genetic history and family lineage from her. In *Daddy-Long-Legs*, Judy writes with disgust about classmate Julia's obsession with family and status. She mockingly recounts the scene for her patron, unaware that Julia is his niece: "Her mother was a Rutherford. The family came over in the ark, and were connected by marriage with Henry the VIII. On her father's side they date back further than Adam. On the topmost branches of her family tree there's a superior breed of monkeys, with very fine silky hair and extra long tails."<sup>79</sup> Judy's parody of Julia's family history dismisses both the Old Testament Book of Exodus and Darwin's

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<sup>79</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 59-60.

*Origin of the Species* with equal aplomb. She neither acknowledges moral superiority through breeding or physical primacy through an extended and likely embellished ancestry. Julia's inquiry indicates a rising interest in heredity, but not one so insidious as to end her friendship with Judy. The quotation is important in contrast with *Dear Enemy* because *Daddy-Long-Legs*'s politics are invested in the rejection of heredity as a critical genetic or social signifier. When Sallie becomes superintendent of the orphan asylum, however establishing heredity is not treated satirically. Instead, heredity-hunting is a serious task. Sallie bemoans her charges with "bad heredity," "morbid heredity," "alcoholic heredity," and "unspeakable heredity."<sup>80</sup>

The fixation on heredity and its purported links to social progress and genetic improvement has specifically socialist roots. Fabian Society secretary Edward Pease wrote his own account of the Society's founding and development and repeatedly invokes Darwin and his *Origin of the Species* as a seminal text for the organization: "It is nowadays not easy to recollect how wide was the intellectual gulf which separated the young generation of that period from their parents. *Origin of Species*, published in 1859, inaugurated an intellectual revolution such as the world had not known since Luther nailed his Theses to the door of All Saints' Church at Wittenberg."<sup>81</sup> Pease's striking comment equates one of the greatest theological rifts in history with the arrival of evolutionary thought. Fabians on both sides of the Atlantic wanted to see social conditions improve. For most, eugenics appeared to promise a way to improve social conditions by lessening the number of poor and alleviating the challenges of developing systems. Eugenics, the Fabians believed, would provide opportunities for less able-bodied citizens. A

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<sup>80</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 90, 260, 305, 231.

<sup>81</sup> Edward R. Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1916), 17.

Darwinian model of thought does place primacy on inherited characteristics and emphasizes the genetic determinism Judy openly mocks in Webster's earlier novel.

In *Dear Enemy*, Sallie arrives eager to institute some immediate changes before—she thinks—soon departing for Washington, DC and a socially advantageous marriage. Instead, Sallie finds herself ever more invested in the reforms and care of the John Grier Home, happily writing to Judy of all the reforms she makes under Judy's detailed instruction. She also meets her "enemy," the cantankerous Dr. Robin "Sandy" MacRae, a pediatrician and committed eugenicist who tasks himself with educating Sallie on the field. Eventually, Sallie learns that Robin married young, his wife a beautiful but mentally ill woman who bore a child that eventually manifested signs of the same illness. The institutionalized wife remains a tragic, enigmatic figure.

Conveniently for the novel's romance plot, the unhappy Mrs. MacRae dies off in the manner of Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* (1847), enabling Sandy and Sallie to marry and, presumably based on the novel's biases, breed healthier children. As Sallie works to reform the orphanage now under her direction, she also embraces what Seitler, in a discussion of Gilman's writings, has termed a regeneration narrative. In her critical work on feminism and eugenics, *Atavistic Tendencies*, Seitler identifies two types of eugenic works—degeneration narratives and regeneration narratives. She notes that the former focuses on decline and the latter, as suggested by the terminology, a chance for reclamation of the body.<sup>82</sup> *Dear Enemy* agonizes over the possibility of mysterious disease or damage arising at any moment. Sandy constantly examines the children looking for signs of emerging problems as if they might manifest any moment. The concern haunted many works of the period, perhaps most notably in Oswald Alving, the

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<sup>82</sup> Seitler, *Atavistic Tendencies*, 27.

genetically doomed son in Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1882). Sallie strives to temper Sandy's anxieties.

In a sense, Sandy lives in a degeneration novel and Sallie focuses on her story as a regeneration narrative, as Seitler terms it, in chorus with Fabian interests. Sallie thus aligns herself with the dominant narratives of American Fabianism, including the views of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Seitler establishes the connection between Gilman's feminist and Fabian socialist concerns: "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's fiction exemplifies a mode of reaction and participation I call 'eugenic feminism': the use of eugenics for a feminist agenda articulated on behalf of perceived sociosexual problems. Gilman deploys this agenda to construct 'regeneration narratives' that respond to fears of degeneration by foregrounding the cultural primacy of women and their reproductive status."<sup>83</sup> At first, Sallie appears to be moving away from a regeneration novel. Rather than marrying a social equal and breeding, Sallie chooses to take on the enormous task of managing a large-scale orphanage. Even after her engagement, she delays marriage to focus her attention on the children of "unspeakable heredity."<sup>84</sup> The fears of degeneration that tie into specific fears of "race death," initially do not faze Sallie. Her reproductive status and potential motherhood are deferred in favor of reform as they previously were for college. After she reads Dugdale's study of the Jukes family, Sallie cheerily writes to Judy: "Moral: watch the children with a bad heredity so carefully that none of them can ever have any excuse for growing up into Jukeses."<sup>85</sup> In this moment, environmentalism overrules the

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<sup>83</sup> Seitler, *Atavistic Tendencies*, 28.

<sup>84</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 231.

<sup>85</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 90.

hereditarian obsessions of Sandy. Sallie clearly believes—before her extended indoctrination in eugenics—that she may overcome heredity with careful curation.

The care of orphans becomes a troubling point as work pulls Sallie further away from marriage and children. The anxieties Seitler notes—that women might fail to fulfill their reproductive obligations for the betterment of the race—were endemic since the late nineteenth century and certainly ones that would have been widely discussed at Vassar College, where Webster matriculated. Sallie responds to the heredity-focused anxieties of those inside and outside the orphan asylum with her own ongoing engagement with the promise and brutality of eugenics. Since she is both a college-educated and upper-class woman, Sallie works outside the home forwarding specific social goals. She catalogues the John Grier Home children and establishes agricultural and building projects as part of productive social reforms. Eventually, she even forsakes a lucrative marriage in favor of marriage to Sandy, a union that will allow her to continue her work. Interestingly, Sallie has removed herself from circulation in the upper echelons of society, and in her place she circulates letters. Sallie has by choice institutionalized herself.

Unlike in *Daddy-Long-Legs* where all the heroine's letters are directed toward a single subject, Sallie in *Dear Enemy* maintains a steady narratorial style without inventing personae for each letter's recipient. Instead of exploring a series of identities, Sallie rigidly adheres to her own as defined through her family, upbringing, and education. Sallie's letters adhere to a more conventional romantic idea of the epistolary body as inherently true as self-representation, unlike Judy. She writes in anticipation of reciprocation. Judy exercises control over letters, Sallie waits for the delivery of letters. She writes to Judy: "The postman is just driving in with, I trust, a letter

from you. Letters make a very interesting break in the monotony of asylum life.”<sup>86</sup> The asylum limits Sallie’s mobility, a dramatic shift from her previously highly mobile social life. What I want to draw out is link between eugenic thought which seeks to control bodies, epistolarity which involves creating bodies that then move away in potentially disruptive journeys or misreading, and the emergence of new technologies from industry, which is the ultimate attempt to regulate means and production. Disability studies scholar Emily Russell discusses the ways that bodies appear mechanized in her analysis of Flannery O’Connor’s *Wise Blood* (1952): “The bodies in *Wise Blood* serve as evidence of a similar process of standardization. Like workers coming and going during the shift change on a Fordist assembly line, characters in O’Connor’s novel frequently confront their own doubles.”<sup>87</sup> I want to draw attention less to the doubling than the body as a product of industry.

Sallie herself is the child of industry. Her father owns a successful overall company. When an asylum trustee grills Sallie on her qualifications, she notes that her family’s industrial business reassure the trustee: “He seemed relieved; he approves of the utilitarian aspect of overalls.”<sup>88</sup> In my discussion of Nesbit’s *Harding’s Luck*, I note the emphasis that Fabians placed on utilitarianism during the fin de siècle. This emphasis extends to the language we find in *Dear Enemy*. Drawing attention to the industrial vocabulary in the novel, Keely writes: “It is also interesting that she calls her orphanage a ‘plant,’ implying a factory’s efficient production of uniform products; her style of orphanage reform will be a curious blend of efficiency (for

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<sup>86</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 69.

<sup>87</sup> Emily Russell, *Reading Embodied Citizenship* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 86.

<sup>88</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 45.

example, centralized dentistry and contracting out of various projects) and a resistance to the uniformity that such efficiency implies.”<sup>89</sup> Yet for all the tightly regulated iterations of industry, Sallie cannot control when she will receive letters, telephone calls or telegrams. Each moves unpredictably, but with letters of her own composition, she can control her own portrayal of life at the orphan asylum and construct her portrayals of individuals. Although other more modern technology would allow Sallie to engage faster and more efficiently with her friends and acquaintances, Sallie expresses anxiety about the telephone—a more unregulated mode of communication through which she has less control over her own self-construction. The housekeeper’s eavesdropping allows her to construct an image of Sallie that operates outside of the protagonist’s establishment of her professional identity. In *Dear Enemy*, Sallie writes a letter to her friend Judy to detail the necessity of written over telephone communication: “Sadie Kate nearly ran her little legs off carrying peppery messages back and forth between us and the doctor. It is only under stress that I communicate with him by telephone, as he has an interfering old termagant of a housekeeper who ‘listens in’ on the down-stairs switch; I don’t wish the scandalous secrets of the John Grier Home spread abroad.”<sup>90</sup> Sallie loses her authority on the telephone in addition to the intimacy (and evidence of tampering) that a letter provides. Inevitably, Sallie recognizes that her agency is tied to the epistle. In a novel that frequently engages enthusiastically and aggressively with eugenics as a socialist doctrine, epistolary bodies epitomize—to Sallie—a regulated and safe mode of information over the new technology threatening to replace it. The new body, both human and epistolary, must also adapt to this brave new world. The letter must travel faster and is aided in its discretion by the invention of the

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<sup>89</sup> Keely, “Teaching Eugenics to Children,” 368.

<sup>90</sup> Jean Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 65.

typewriter and an increasingly rapid postal service. Although the telephone is a product of industry, conversations conducted on it must be connected by an operator and can be communicated by a housekeeper, both of whom have the ability to listen in. The telephone allows for a spontaneity that means ceding control when Sallie wants to exert it.

The telephone permits simultaneous talk, interruption, and the opportunity for those around either speaker to eavesdrop. The letter, in juxtaposition, affords total narratorial control (unless intercepted, which no letters are in *Dear Enemy*). The epistle may appear retrograde as a form, but the letter allows the female voice to maintain undisrupted authority. The emphasis on female voices also made sense in terms of the historical politicization of the orphan asylum in late nineteenth-century America. Crenson addresses how the weakness of socialism in the United States—Fabianism included—left many under-protected:

[W]ithout a politicized labor movement to organize them or a strong socialist party to mobilize them, the poor could not do much to help themselves—or their potential allies among the Progressive reformers. Lacking the ideological and political resources that sustained state social policy in Western Europe, American reformers tried to win public acceptance for their welfare measures by appropriating the sanctity of motherhood and the purity of childhood.

“Maternalist” social policy was welfare for the blameless.<sup>91</sup>

Olive Schreiner in *Woman and Labour* (1911) and Nesbit in her speech to the Fabian Women’s Group in 1908 share this interest in paid maternity but, read in a larger context, feminists from this period suggest this type of maternity under the assumption that the beneficiary will be an able-bodied child. Soon after arriving at the John Grier Home, Sallie takes care to separate out

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<sup>91</sup> Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage*, 31.



and rehouse multiple children. Her maternal impulses end with those children designated as non-normative, because, after all, industry is about regulation: “Five other children have been sent to their proper institutions. One of them is deaf, one an epileptic, and the other three approaching idiocy. None of them ever ought to have been accepted here. This is an educational institution, and we can’t waste our valuable plant in caring for defectives.”<sup>92</sup> Certainly, the narrative does not shy away from the historical reality that orphan asylums were numerous in the early twentieth century and rigorously segregated. The capitalist language surrounding the choice to remove the children suggests a much more insidious relationship, especially given what is generally read as a socialist text. Not only does Sallie vacillate between environmental and hereditarian thought; she also claims the principles of socialism only to use the language of capitalism. As a result of this slippage, *Dear Enemy* reveals that enacting socialism when working within a capitalist state and upbringing is, perhaps, more difficult than Sallie initially believed. Eugenics appeals to the socialists by promising social parity once those whom they perceive as incapable of participating as workers no longer breed. The capitalists see the financial benefits of not needing to support those that are unable to support themselves even as they are made dependent on the state. What’s interesting is that Sallie’s mission, per Judy, is to help individualize the orphans, who have been forced into uniform compliance. When Sallie arrives, she hates uniformity: “Words can’t tell you how dreary and dismal and smelly it is: long corridors, bare walls; blue-uniformed, dough-faced little inmates that haven’t the slightest resemblance to human children.”<sup>93</sup> Although Sallie wants the children in her care to experience childhood outside such conformity, she immediately rids the asylum of as many “defectives” as

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<sup>92</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 55.

<sup>93</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 16.

she is able, meaning that individuality and improvements may only be made after the excising of the undesirable children. This dismissal of the genetically suspect or unknowable child stands in stark contrast with Judy's outlook in *Daddy-Long-Legs*. The contrast between the two novels also mirrors their different models of epistolarity. Judy writes exclusively to a cipher recipient, on who is always unknown and unresponsive which she ultimately recognizes as an opportunity for creation and control. Sallie writes to known entities and the unknown body or person to her is a loss of control rather than an enhancement of her own agency.

*Daddy-Long-Legs* revels in the freedoms of unknown heredity as much as *Dear Enemy* works to regulate epistles and orphan bodies alike. In *Daddy-Long-Legs*, when Judy embraces the freedom of inventing her own history and ethnic identity, she marvels: "It's really awfully queer not to know what one is—sort of exciting and romantic. There are such a lot of possibilities. Maybe I'm not American; lots of people aren't. I may be straight descended from the ancient Romans, or I may be a Viking's daughter, or I may be the child of a Russian exile and belong by rights in a Siberian prison, or maybe I'm a Gipsy—I think perhaps I am."<sup>94</sup> The lack of a known religious or national heritage provides Judy with immeasurable opportunity. She posits identities that include despised religious minorities (Italian Catholic), politically dangerous (Bolshevik), and racially deplored (Romani). Yet this is one distinct moment in *Daddy-Long-Legs* when Judy's view of the orphanage is very limited. Whatever Judy may be, she uses the term asylum as generic, when in fact orphan asylums of the period, especially in New York state, were carefully segregated based on what heritage was known or "defects" could be determined: "Jewish children were sent to the newly opened Hebrew Protectory, or to the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, or the Hebrew Shelterling Guardian Society. For the African-American

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<sup>94</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 125.

children, there was the Colored Orphan Asylum in Harlem or the Howard Colored Orphan Asylum in Brooklyn. The Roman Catholic children were sent to a variety of residential institutions [...].”<sup>95</sup> For mentally disabled children, or as Sallie terms them, “defectives,” other specialized institutions awaited their arrival once their conditions manifested. Sallie’s comments are only the beginning of a series of disturbing declarations as Sallie tries to keep bodies both orphan and written in some semblance of order. The novel’s politics are a far cry from its predecessor’s. Sallie fears the chaos that may result from the genetic secrets lurking in her orphans and the novel does not treat her anxiety with skepticism. Yet in *Daddy-Long-Legs*, Judy eagerly writes of how she has shed her personal history and found status as an equal among peers, in spite of her very different background: “Think of Jerusha Abbott, late of the John Grier Home for Orphans, rooming with a Pendleton. This is a democratic country.”<sup>96</sup> It is even more than democratic, for though Judy knows nothing of her genetic history, she marries a millionaire and proceeds to produce children with him.

Sallie alternates between highly ambitious plans to give the orphans in her charge every advantage, and she does so with much eugenics-induced handwringing. When told by one trustee that Sallie risks raising the orphans’ expectations higher than befits their station in life, she writes to Judy in a fury: “At that my Irish blood came to the surface, and I told him that if God had planned to make all of these 113 little children into useless, ignorant, unhappy citizens, I was going to fool God! That we weren’t educating them out of their class in the least. We were educating them *into* their natural class much more effectually.”<sup>97</sup> Yet within the span of a few

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<sup>95</sup> Crenson, *Building the Invisible Orphanage*, 140.

<sup>96</sup> Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*, 109.

<sup>97</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 183.

letters, eugenics starts creeping into Sallie's correspondence more openly. Sallie, under Sandy's direction, decides to expand her research into eugenics: "A person in my position ought to be well read in physiology, biology, psychology, sociology, and eugenics; she should know the hereditary effects of insanity, idiocy, and alcohol."<sup>98</sup> This new fixation by institutional reformers reflects an accurate historical trend in the United States during the early part of the century. Noted disability studies scholars Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell write of the rise of eugenics in the latter nineteenth century: "U.S. eugenics developed as a hegemonic formula from an array of Victorian ideologies. These included proliferating institutions for the incarceration of 'defective' citizens; the ascendancy of neo-Darwinism (or social Darwinism) in relation to the purification of human hereditary stock."<sup>99</sup> Fabians, as previously noted, saw much of their ideology driven by utilitarianism and an ardent commitment to Darwin's theory of evolution. Combined with the new pathologizing of anyone deemed a "defective person," eugenics particularly exploded in popularity with the publication and dissemination of the aforementioned *The Jukes Family*. Its author, Dugdale, watched in horror as eugenicists appropriated his work, declaring that it supported their belief in the inevitability of hereditary defect.<sup>100</sup> Webster's novel vacillates between a commitment to the importance of promoting eugenic policies in the orphan asylum and a determination to see the value in all children. After a trying day, Sallie writes: "Those awful questions of heredity and environment that the doctor broods over so constantly

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<sup>98</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 90.

<sup>99</sup> Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 73.

<sup>100</sup> Edwin Black, *War against the Weak* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), 24.

are getting into my blood, too; and it's a vicious habit."<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, Webster presents the interest in eugenics as progressing much like a disease that infects Sallie.

As the possible hereditary troubles of the orphans in her care starts to truly worry Sallie, she becomes more determined to use her letters to assert control over the doctor. Her subsequent missives placate her dear enemy. She soon acquiesces in reading Goddard's *Kallikak Study*, which, as mentioned, advocates negative eugenics and accepts heredity and genetic predestination. Goddard was a fanatic eugenicist eager to terminate the lives of those that comprise his case study, *The Kallikak Family*, which offered two solutions: mass sterilization and mass incarceration, the social effects of which still haunt American society. Sallie succumbs to the study's dire warnings. In her next letter, she writes: "I usually manage half an hour of recreation after dinner, and though I had wanted to glance at Wells's latest novel, I will amuse myself instead with your feeble-minded family."<sup>102</sup> Convinced to read the Kallikak report, Sallie in turn disseminates its contents to her fiancé, Gordon, thus continuing in the spread of eugenics and, worse yet, to someone with far-reaching political clout: "I've got to make over society first, so that it won't send me sub-normal children to work with. Excuse all this excited conversation; but I've just met up with the subject of feeble-mindedness, and it's appalling—and interesting. It is your business as a legislator to make laws that will remove it from the world."<sup>103</sup> Bodies out of control start overtaking Sallie. Her letters increase in frequency as do her management problems. When a criminal employee of robust build refuses to be fired, Sallie fires off a series of missives—a phone call to Sandy and a telegram to Jervis, the managing trustee. The phone

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<sup>101</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 103.

<sup>102</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 104.

<sup>103</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 107.

call proves faster and more effective as the doctor makes a rapid appearance to assist in the dismissal. A vigorously worded telegram from Jervis arrives too late to be of any use. Sallie recounts the scene for Jervis of the quick time between Sandy's receipt of her phone call and his arrival at the asylum: "And he hung up the receiver, cranked up his car, and flew up here at lawless speed."<sup>104</sup> Bodies and information circulate at increasingly rapid rates and the link with her anxiety over accelerating technologies coincides with the anxiety that human intelligence and ability are in retrograde motion. Sallie's uncertainty about the acceleration of technology and science puts her in dialogue with a growing body of fiction by socialist writers who view advancing civilization as a sign of incipient moral and physical decline.

Human innovation corresponding with human degeneracy, whether mental or moral, crops up in several Fabian novels, including those of Edward Bellamy and H. G. Wells, not to mention the plays of Ibsen, whose work held special favor and fascination for members of the Society. Novels also operate as corruptive bodies. Toward the end of the novel, Sallie encounters a college friend Helen, now a divorcée, whose parents blame her failed marriage on "sending her to college and letting her read such dreadful modern people as Ellen Key and Bernard Shaw."<sup>105</sup> Swedish feminist Ellen Key (1849-1926) wrote on feminism and childhood education, and Shaw's feminism and his socialist writings have been discussed extensively here. That conservative American parents might view these writers, both of whom had untraditional, extramarital sex, as a negative influence derailing Helen's ability to marry and breed is hardly a surprise. The centuries-old anxiety that reading corrupts the female mind has a heredity all of its own. Yet for all Sallie's growing anxiety about her wards, she eventually starts to retreat from

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<sup>104</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 121.

<sup>105</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 278.

the more extreme attitudes of the eugenics movement. In a letter to Judy, Sallie confesses her doubts about the theories so obsessed over by Sandy: “Privately, I don’t believe there’s one thing in heredity, provided you snatch the babies away before their eyes are opened. We’ve got the sunniest youngster here you ever saw; his mother and Aunt Ruth and Uncle Silas all died insane, but he is as placid and unexcitable as a cow.”<sup>106</sup> Sallie’s letters to Judy becomes less frantic and she starts ruing the obsession with heredity blocking adoptions of healthy children. When she does find a potential home for one little girl, she notes to Judy: “He liked her heredity, he liked her looks, he liked her spirit, he liked *her*.”<sup>107</sup>

Heredity becomes the dominant conversation ruling over the orphans’ lives, even though for many they have no proof of their origins, much like Judy in *Daddy-Long-Legs*. The orphan asylum has, by implication, exclusively white, Protestant children, but even that cannot be considered sufficiently secure for many of the prospective parents or even the satisfaction of the asylum’s physician, who remains fixated on searching for signs of mental aberrations in the children. Yet, ultimately, the heredity defection arguments sneak back in. In one of Sallie’s last letters, she witnesses in horror as a former inmate of the orphan asylum, descended from alcoholics, returns to the asylum a hardened alcoholic not yet out of his teens. Sallie writes in distress to her fiancé that she sees little hope for him: “A boy—sixteen—of unspeakable heredity has nearly poisoned himself with a disgusting mixture of alcohol and witch-hazel.”<sup>108</sup> Sallie moans to Judy that it would be better to let the boy die given the advanced state of his drinking.

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<sup>106</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 143-44.

<sup>107</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 236.

<sup>108</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 311.

For all the anxiety about heredity, Jukeses, Kallikaks, and moral corruption, ultimately Sallie is the one who finds that she herself has been profoundly altered. After breaking off her engagement with Gordon, she writes to Judy noting that she herself feels as though she has lost her own person after her experience acting as an asylum superintendent: “The girl he loves is not the *me* I want to be. It’s the *me* I’ve been trying to grow away from all this last year. I’m not sure she ever really existed. Gordon just imagined she did.”<sup>109</sup> Instead, Sallie ends up writing a letter that is obscured from the reader with no explanation other than that Sallie hopes Judy has destroyed it. “Did you respect my command to destroy that letter? I should not care to have it appear in my collected correspondence.”<sup>110</sup> Bodies again begin moving rapidly outside control as a letter is referred to but omitted and suddenly the reader is deliberately excluded from one of Sallie’s epistles. Ultimately, Sallie exerts control over the narrative with a troubling efficiency. The doctor’s wife, she learns, conveniently died having disintegrated in what sounds quite like a case of post-partum depression. Ironically, this is the same disease depicted by fellow Fabian Gilman in her most famous work, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892). Sallie concludes that the death was a good one. Between her feeble-minded orphans, the advanced dipsomaniac, and one mentally ill adult, Sallie would consign many to the grave as an act of mercy. Bodies—like letters—are controlled and removed from circulation. In her final letter to Judy, Sallie summarizes the doctor’s history:

[H]e knew at the time of his marriage that he ought not to marry her, he knew all about her nervous instability; but he thought, being a doctor, that he could overcome it, and she was beautiful! He gave up his city practice and came to the

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<sup>109</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 334.

<sup>110</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 342.



country on her account. And then after the little girl's birth she went all to pieces, and he had to 'put her away,' to use Mrs. McGurk's phrase. The child is six now, a sweet, lovely little thing to look at, but, I just from what he said, quite abnormal. He has a trained nurse with her always.<sup>111</sup>

Sallie is thus positioned to become stepmother to a girl who belongs to a group of "feeble-minded" individuals that Sallie comments should be isolated from society: "Society ought to segregate them on feeble-minded farms, where they can earn their living in peaceful menial pursuits, and not have children. Then in a generation or so we might be able to wipe them out."<sup>112</sup> Although Sallie at times displays greater compassion, her compassion itself is the threat, given that she agrees with the conclusion of Goddard that segregation and sterilization are the most compassionate solutions for treating those deemed defective by eugenics. In its conclusion, the solution is utterly Fabian. Rather than an outright slaughter, slowly institute reforms that enable the state to perform these very actions to slowly annihilate those considered a drain on society. Even Sallie's solution (via Goddard) provides some utilitarian role before they are to expire childless.

*Dear Enemy* contradicts much of the critical work of its predecessor, suspecting and regulating the bodies of those whose heredity is suspect while Judy travels, distant from all that happens but reproducing. By the end of the novel, Judy, she of mysterious—possibly even morbid, bad, or unspeakable—heredity has had her first child. Perhaps in the end it is *Daddy-Long-Leg's* striking ambition for social reform and freedom that overcomes the oppression of genetic destiny.

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<sup>111</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 345.

<sup>112</sup> Webster, *Dear Enemy*, 106.

## Conclusion

I loved E. Nesbit. She is still probably the children's writer with whom I most identify. She wasn't very sentimental.

—J.K. Rowling, Interview, 2005 <sup>1</sup>

I began this dissertation by discussing the importance of A. S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* in directing attention to previously overlooked contributions of Fabian women writers and I end with a look at how these diverse Fabian women left an indelible mark on children's literature worldwide. Although Byatt's account of the Fabian movement and its children's book authors is a work of fiction, it is nonetheless the strongest acknowledgment of the cultural significance of E. Nesbit's legacy. The quote with which I open my conclusion comes from a radio interview with J. K. Rowling (1965- ), author of the internationally beloved Harry Potter series (1997-2007), which reinvigorated a flagging publishing industry and brought new attention to children's literature. Rowling repeatedly refers to Nesbit as one of her greatest influences and pays particular attention in the interview to Nesbit's interest in portraying children as real, rather than idealized, individuals. The lack of sentimentality also resonates with Evelyn Sharp's contention that childhood is not happy or easy, a strand also picked up by Jean Webster. Nesbit's influence extends to writers including C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) who wrote the canonical *Chronicles of Narnia*, Diana Wynne Jones (1934-2011), and even P. L. Travers (1899-1996), whose *Mary Poppins* series continues to enthrall new generations of children. All of these books

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<sup>1</sup> J. K. Rowling, interview by Stephen Fry, BBC Radio4, 10 December 2005, accessed May 28, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0076w0r>.

involve political conversations (the monarchical ruling of Narnia, enterprising young women, unmaternal nannies) and allow their child protagonists to engage fully as capable and mature thinkers. Nesbit's impact remains undisputed among the world of children's book writers.

My chapters are arranged chronologically, but now I want to discuss them in a different order to consider the legacies of their influence from best known to least known. Though Nesbit remains the most recognized figure in terms of galvanization of multiple generations of children's book authors, I want to consider how Webster and Sharp fomented their own distinct legacies. Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs* has had the best publishing history in terms of remaining continuously in print since its initial run in 1912. Not only does the novel maintain Anglophonic popularity, but also has had enduring impact in different countries. Available in English, French, Farsi, Spanish, Korean, and Japanese, the novel continues to hold its own power in addition to spawning other young adult epistolary novels. The novel's title has become a catchphrase in contemporary Korean for men anonymously assisting young women and the Japanese anime series remains popular. *Daddy-Long-Legs* also reinvigorated the epistolary genre as one well suited for a young adult audience. Daniel Handler (1970- ), who remains most famous for his Lemony Snicket books, also penned the well-reviewed *Why We Broke Up* (2011), an epistolary novel that examines female sexuality and identity. Best-selling writer Jenny Han has an epistolary series that includes *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* (2014) and *P. S. I Still Love You* (2015). The novels, narrated by a Korean-American protagonist, mix romance with cultural commentary and political sensibility, much in the spirit of Webster's work. Not only do Judy Abbott's ancestors continue to write letters in the digital age, they also do so through the same articulation of agency that drove Webster's fin-de-siècle heroine.

I want to finish by considering the legacy of Sharp, the apparent anomaly with whom I began my dissertation. Sharp radically reinvented the fairy tale as a space for feminist intervention and queer culture to thrive. History tends to remember Sharp primarily as a suffragist and there is little direct evidence that she had followers in literary circles over time. I want to suggest, however, that her work anticipates the recovery of the fairy tale for the feminist writers that would follow nearly a century later, most notably with Angela Carter (1940-1992), who wrote *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). In the late 1970s and 1980s, Carter's powerful volume, which revised the well-known fairy tales that Charles Perrault brought to public attention in 1697, demonstrated the fairy tale's potential for challenging oppressive domestic spaces and asserting female sexuality.<sup>2</sup> No evidence exists to imply that Sharp exerted a direct influence on Carter, but the two women shared an interest in expanding the scope of the fairy tale for specific, highly political ends that in particular focused on gender performance and freedom. Ellen Datlow (1949- ) and Tanith Lee (1947-2015), too, with their feminist collections of new fairy tales sparked new mainstream interest in the genre as a place not necessarily of female subjugation, but also women's and girls' potential and realized promise. Sharp held the fairy tale and children's book also as a space where men could fully recognize women as adept intellectuals, a hope that extended even into her final collection of children's tales, *The Victories of Olivia*. Sharp writes: "The interesting thing was that Tom did understand. The man who loved Pamela had imagination as well as brains, and he stood by her in her struggle against old-fashioned ideals, and fought her battle for her with an antagonistic, uncomprehending family."<sup>3</sup> This idea,

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<sup>2</sup> Lucie Armitt, "The Fragile Frames of *The Bloody Chamber*," in *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter: Fiction, Femininity, Feminism*, ed. Joseph Bristow and Trev Lynn Broughton (London: Longman, 1997), 88.

which echoes E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908), where women and men work collectively for the betterment of society, continues to appear in children's books today not as a marginalized topic, but as a focus.

The positioning of children at the forefront of political uprisings and debates continues from the Fabian movement into the most compelling and influential young adult books in the current market. In the bestselling *The Hunger Games*, penned by Suzanne Collins (1962- ), the heroine overthrows a despotic government. Lois Lowry (1937- ) centers her award-winning *The Giver* (1993) on the hero's recognition that he must challenge his society's existing social order. Whether in ways large or small, the child political hero is here to stay, even if she has moved far from her socialist ancestry. Although Sharp, Nesbit, and Webster emphasized reform, in children's literature, they ignited a revolution.

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<sup>3</sup> Evelyn Sharp, "Pamela, the Infant, and the Right Man" in *The Victories of Olivia and Other Stories* (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1912), 281.

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