

# Telling Children's Stories

*Narrative Theory and Children's Literature*

EDITED BY MIKE CADDEN



Frontiers of Narrative

SERIES EDITOR

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## Introduction

MIKE CADDEN

To introduce this collection of essays on narrative theory and children's literature, I'd like your indulgence as I discuss one area of narrative theory that takes on different implications when discussed in the context of children's literature: the peritext. It's my way of justifying the intersection of narratology and literature for the young right from the start. The second part of the introduction is more conventional: an explanation of the development of the study of children's literature as an academic field, the development of its literary theory, and the relatively recent embrace of narratology. You'll find particular introductions to the collected essays themselves at the beginning of each part.

### *The Peritext and Children's Literature*

"This is [. . .] the part where the author tells why the book exists and why the reader might want to read it. And you can skip it if you're in a hurry."—Laura Schlitz.

These are the first words of the foreword to the 2008 Newbery Medal-winning book.<sup>1</sup> It seems like a good way to introduce a book about narrative theory and children's literature. An editor's introduction to any book about narrative approaches should begin with some self-consciousness about two separate matters: the role of the peritext and the nature of the implied reader.<sup>2</sup> In fact both matters are discussed in this volume by several essayists.



## “Time No Longer”

*The Context(s) of Time  
in Tom’s Midnight Garden*

ANGELIKA ZIRKER

In *Tom’s Midnight Garden* wishes magically come true: when Tom Long arrives at his aunt and uncle’s flat, he longs for a garden (his “longing” is even expressed in his name), and then he finds one; in a manner familiar from fairy tales, the wish for something leads to its appearance. Yet he can only enter the garden at midnight; during daytime it is gone, and all that Tom finds in its place is a backyard with dustbins. In the garden he meets a girl whom he befriends, Hatty, who is slightly younger than Tom but who grows into a woman over the summer. Only toward the end of the story does he learn that Hatty is actually Mrs. Bartholomew, his aunt and uncle’s elderly landlady. She remembers and dreams of the garden of her childhood throughout the summer, and Tom is able to enter those dreams.

In Philippa Pearce’s novel the realms of past and present, dreams and memories, the fantastic and reality are linked through the friendship between Tom and Hatty, which eventually overcomes time: in the garden the two children become friends; her dreams and the memories embedded in these dreams enable an old woman to return to the past and play with a boy in the garden of her childhood; in the end this boy meets the old woman in his

“present reality.” Thus time is overcome not merely in the sense of a time journey but basically through memories.

Time is a prevalent topic and motif in *Tom’s Midnight Garden*. The whole story is triggered by a grandfather clock that has magic qualities. It strikes thirteen times at one o’clock in the morning and thus opens the garden for Tom, which he can enter through a backyard door. In her study *Children’s Literature Comes of Age*, Maria Nikolajeva observes that passages between worlds are “most tangible in time fantasy. The passage is often connected with patterns like the door, the magic object and the magic helper” (124). The magic object in Tom’s case is the grandfather clock. In what Tom up to this point perceives as his real world, time stands still while he is in the garden.

Time is fantastical in this novel: dreams and memories become reality; laws that govern time and place are suspended in the midnight garden, the fantastical world that Tom enters is a part of reality, namely, of Hatty’s past, and it is real to Tom, for he does not merely sleep and dream of the garden. Hatty’s dreams and memories are no longer subjective, but they become shared experiences, and they go beyond temporal and spatial limits. Hence, in *Tom’s Midnight Garden* different layers of time are interlinked. The fantastic lies in the coexistence of these layers; it magically joins together the boy Tom with both Hatty the girl and the old woman. Their friendship is represented as a relationship that comes about through magic and through magical wish-fulfillment but, at the same time, is real.

### *Magic: The Grandfather Clock*

When Tom has to leave his family because his brother has fallen ill with measles, he is not very happy. He feels like a person in exile when he arrives at his Uncle Alan and Aunt Gwen’s flat, which does not even have a garden. When he enters the house, he feels that its “heart [. . . is] empty—cold—dead” (9). But the house is not dead; there is a sound: “the tick, and then tick, and then tick, of a grandfather clock” (10).

The clock immediately stirs Tom’s curiosity, even more so when

he finds that although it keeps good time, it seldom chooses “to strike the right hour” (10), which he at first considers “senselessly wrong” (18). When at night he cannot sleep because he has been overfed by his aunt—who sees her vocation in spoiling him with food to make his stay more agreeable—he listens to the clock and counts, which has “become a habit with him at night” (19):

“It’s one o’clock,” Tom whispered angrily over the edge of the bedclothes. “Why don’t you strike one o’clock, then, as the clocks would do at home?” Instead: Five! Six! Even in his irritation, Tom could not stop counting [. . .]. Seven! Eight! After all, the clock was the only thing that would speak to him at all in these hours of darkness. Nine! Ten! “You are doing it,” thought Tom, but yawning in the midst of his unwilling admiration. Yes, and it hadn’t finished yet: Eleven! Twelve! “Fancy striking midnight twice in one night!” jeered Tom, sleepily. Thirteen! proclaimed the clock, and then stopped striking. (19)

The passage shows the fantastical workings of the clock: Tom thinks he must have imagined the thirteen strokes while dozing off, yet he does not feel comfortable with this explanation. The clock is not only personified but also animated: it not only “speaks” to Tom but goes on chiming, and finally “proclaim[s]” the thirteenth hour. The house at last “convinces” him to get up: when Tom is reluctant to check the time shown on the clock, the house more or less urges him to do so, “sigh[ing] impatiently” and telling him that while he is reflecting he is “missing [his] chance” (21) to explore and start his “expedition” (22) during which he finds the door to the garden. Hence Tom was right in his observation that the clock was situated at the “heart of the house” (10), with its regular sound of “ticking” resembling the heartbeat. The ticking of the clock later even encourages him to climb the stairs to Hatty’s room: “Its ticking sounded to him like a human heart, alive and beating—and he thought of Hatty when he thought that” (133). In her later novel, *The Children of Charlecote*

(1989), Pearce would write: “It’s the house that remembers” (qtd. in Hall 155). The continuance of both the house and the clock as a permanent part of it means that “time’s passage does not matter, for despite it, things do continue in the same way” (Nodelman 8). Pearce refers at least to two earlier children’s texts, namely, Alison Uttley’s *A Traveller in Time*, which appeared in 1939, and Lucy M. Boston’s *The Children of Green Knowe*, published in 1954 (Nodelman 7–9): in both the house that is entered by the strange child acts as a medium that enables contact with the past.<sup>1</sup> Nodelman states that what makes *Tom’s Midnight Garden* different lies in the fact that “Pearce makes the Victorian Hatty an equal partner in the modern Tom’s play, quite unlike the mysterious presences of Jacobean children that flit around the edges in Tolly’s consciousness [in *The Children of Green Knowe*]” (9). The achievement of Pearce is to credibly link the past and the present through the existence of Hatty in Tom’s reality; she is not a ghost from the past but a real person.

Hence Tom’s discovery of the garden happens, more or less, by mere chance: he needs light to read the face of the clock, and as he cannot find a light switch, he opens the door at the end of the hall to let in a moonbeam from outside. Upon opening the door he is no longer interested in turning “to see what it showed him on the clock-face” (24) for he sees a beautiful garden. This has two effects on him: first, he believes that his aunt and uncle have deceived him because they had told him that there was only a backyard, “very poky, with rubbish bins” (24), and second, he starts to plan further explorations of the garden during the following day.

Upon retreating into the house he again forgets to check the clock; he sees a maid and, since he cannot find a hiding place, speaks to her. When she does not react, he notices that the hall has changed completely. It is richly decorated, but very soon the decoration fades, “furniture and rugs and pictures” begin “to fail to be there” (28). Yet he is still able to see the garden, and “after a long look” (28) Tom returns to bed.

After his first discovery Tom goes to the garden every night

and soon realizes that during his explorations, time in his “real world” stops: during his first thorough exploration of the garden, he is “uneasily aware of the passage of time” (43), but, upon returning to the flat, finds that it is “only a few minutes past midnight” (47). This suggests that as soon as Tom enters the garden, he enters a different temporal realm; only those minutes he needs to walk downstairs and return to the flat are reflected on the clock in his world. What is more, time in his world is not the same as in the garden: “He had come down the stairs [. . .] at midnight; but when he opened that door and stepped out into the garden, the time was much later” (41). This also becomes evident with regard to the hyacinths he smells during his first visit to the garden and his aunt’s reaction when he tells her about them: “Hyacinths don’t flower even out of doors at this time of year—it’s too late in the summer” (33). This shows that not only the hours are different but also months and the season, which becomes even more evident later when Tom enters the garden in winter and goes skating with Hatty.

Mrs. Bartholomew, that is, Hatty, does not dream in chronological order either. The night when Tom sees the storm and lightning in the garden illustrates this. This occurs at a rather early stage of his visit still, for he does not yet know Hatty, but it is actually the last time Hatty ever sees him (211–12). During the storm Tom hears a cry “of the terror he himself felt” (56) when he sees the fir tree fall; the experience makes him very uneasy. But it is during the next night that he has “the greatest shock of all” (57), for he then sees that the tree is actually there; “the ivy-grown fir tree still towered above” (57) the other trees. This puzzles him immensely, and he even asks his uncle whether it is possible that a tree could lie “fallen at one time, and then be standing up again as it was before it fell” (59). Uncle Alan, however, answers that something like this could not have happened, quoting the proverb “unless you put the clock back” (59). But this is exactly what happens: the proverb is to be understood literally, for Mrs. Bartholomew in her dreams actually does turn the clock back. This shows that time, as presented in the story, is not linear and

continuous, and that Tom’s “journeys into time are not continuous; they are not even in chronological order” (Aers 78). The supernatural events that seem to be possible only in fairy tales—as Aunt Gwen points out to Tom—become explicable:<sup>2</sup> what Tom experiences happens in Mrs. Bartholomew’s dreams, that is, her memories. The dream thus serves as a means of explanation of those events that are fantastical; “prominent within a work of fantasy is some element of the *impossible* or *supernatural*, the writer relying on our consensus as to the nature of the possible or natural within the world of non-literary experience” (Attebery 54). Tom thus not only exists in two times simultaneously, but he seems to move also in four different states and realms at the same time himself: he is someone else’s memory, and to be this he has to literally have been there in the past. Further, he is part of someone else’s dream and simultaneously exists in his own current waking reality.

*Memories and the Past: “Time No Longer”*

Mrs. Bartholomew’s dreams are the key to understanding Tom’s “multiple” existence: they are associative, not chronological.<sup>3</sup> One example may help clarify this: after the geese have entered the garden, Hatty is found to be responsible for it. She is scolded by her aunt and told that she was “a charity child, a thankless pauper that she had received into her home as a duty to her late husband” (95). Tom witnesses the scene and subsequently falls asleep in the garden. When he wakes, he is “aware of some difference in his surroundings—a difference in time” (96): he sees Hatty, dressed in mourning, “sobbing into her hands” (96), and suddenly he is conscious of her being younger. Because of her having been called “a charity child,” Hatty is reminded of her status and subsequently dreams of her grief following her parents’ death—a chain of associations is set loose by the memory of the geese incident that also helps Tom understand that she is an orphan.

When Hatty has hurt her head after falling from the branch of a tree, Tom visits her in the room that is now his. There he begins to think “about the Past, that Time made so far away. Time had

taken this Present of Hatty's and turned it into his Past. Yet even so, here and now, for a little while, this was somehow made his Present too—his and Hatty's. Then he remembered the grandfather clock, that measured out both his time and Hatty's and he remembered the picture on the face [of the clock]" (143).<sup>4</sup> In fact it is here that he begins "to ponder the meaning of time and to question Hatty about the clock" (Wolf 145). The following day a letter arrives asking him to come home next Saturday, which leaves him only four nights to answer all his questions and to spend time in the garden. During his visit in Hatty's room, he asks her about the clock and wants to find out more about it. She promises to "unlock the pendulum case. [. . .] Then Tom [can] read the secret for himself" (144).

It is winter when he next meets her, and Hatty is outside, skating. She is rather reluctant to go inside the house, and Tom has to persuade her to unlock the clock and have him take a look. He is now able to read the inscription on the pendulum that says "Time No Longer": "'Time no longer?' said Tom in surprise. [. . .] 'But no longer than what?'" (157). He does not understand, and Hatty shows him the text below the picture, "Rev X. 1-6" (157). Yet, he is not able to decipher and understand the emblem.

"Time no longer," as Tom will find out shortly afterward, is a quotation from the book of Revelation, and since Tom does not understand what is meant by it, he and Hatty go to the heating house to check in the gardener Abel's Bible. They find the relevant passage about the "annihilation of time at the end of the world" (Wolf 145) and learn that the Book of Life will be opened on the Day of Judgment and that then "there should be time no longer" (159). Tom at first has a very literal understanding of this; he thinks "of all the clocks in the world stopping ticking, and their striking stopped too, drowned and stopped for ever by the sound of the great Trumpet" (160). This gives him so much to think about that he does not even want to stay in the garden with Hatty but returns to the house. Back in his bed, he cannot sleep: "But if Time is ever to end, that means that, here and now, Time itself is only a temporary thing. It can be dispensed with

perhaps; or rather, it can be dodged. Tom himself might be able to dodge behind Time's back and have the Past—that is, Hatty's Present and the garden—here, now and for ever. To manage that, of course, he must understand the workings of Time" (162). In this, however, he is wrong, as he will later come to understand: he is not able to stay in the garden, that is, in the past, forever.

The next morning he enters a discussion with his uncle, who presents him with theories of time that Tom cannot follow. His uncle coincidentally mentions Rip van Winkle. Tom immediately starts thinking about Rip van Winkle "because he was the first person Uncle Alan had mentioned that Tom really knew anything about: indeed, Tom knew all about him" (165). Tom starts to see himself as a

Rip van Winkle in reverse [. . .]. Instead of going forward for twenty years, Tom went back a hundred and more, to Hatty's lifetime. He did not always go back to exactly the same Time, every night; nor did he take Time in its usual order. [. . .] He had seen Hatty as a girl of his own age, then as a much younger one, and recently as a girl who—although Tom would not yet fully admit it—was outgrowing him altogether. In flashes, Tom had seen Hatty's Time—the garden's Time—covering what must be about ten years, while his own Time achieved the weeks of a summer holiday. (165)

This is a revelation and insight to Tom, whose efforts as a detective have finally brought him to a solution. He can now even be sure that "neither of [them are] ghosts" and has settled "things to his own satisfaction" (166).<sup>5</sup>

In the wake of his reflections on time, he has an idea when he next meets Hatty—in winter still. He notices that she is older and, what is more, that she has followed her cousin James's advice that she "should meet more people" (138) and make friends. Yet she sees Tom, who makes her promise that she will leave her skates underneath the secret floorboard of her bedroom cupboard: "I only want you to keep your skates, always when you're not

using them, in that secret place you showed me in your bedroom cupboard, under the floorboards” (169). After she has made the promise, he returns to the house but can only open the cupboard floorboard in the morning: “He saw two brown-paper packages in the hole [. . .] : they were a pair of skates, with boots still screwed and strapped to them” (172). With them he finds a note referring to Hatty’s promise; she left the skates when she left the house. While oiling the skates, he finds “the solution—rounded and perfect—of his problem of Time. [. . .] The hours after the twelfth do not exist in ordinary Time; they are not bound by the laws of ordinary Time; they are not over in sixty ordinary minutes; they are endless” (173–74). He concludes from this that he “could, after all, have both things—the garden and his family—because he could stay for ever in the garden, and yet for ever his family would be expecting him next Saturday afternoon” (174).

The following night he again goes to the garden and skates with Hatty to Ely—“two skaters on one pair of skates” (181); the skates “now exist, like Tom, in both past and present” (Krips 178). Thus the skates have the effect of making the story of Tom fully credible and also more plausible:<sup>6</sup> he does not simply imagine things, nor does he merely travel into the past, but the two layers of time, past and present, are interlinked by material objects. Like the house and the grandfather clock, the skates become a part of Tom’s reality and are, at the same time, a part of Hatty’s dreamworld and thus of her memories.

The idea of past and present existing simultaneously goes back to Augustine, who stated that “all this while in the eternal nothing is flitting, but all is at once present, whereas no time is all at once present” (*Confessions* 11.11). Hence all time is eternally present, that is, past, present and future are simultaneous. The borders between the different strands of time can thus be overcome, a thought that is also expressed in T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, specifically in “Burnt Norton,” a text that may very well have served as a direct source for Pearce, especially if one considers the parallels between *Tom’s Midnight Garden* and the beginning of Eliot’s poem:

Time present and time past  
 Are both perhaps present in time future,  
 And time future contained in time past.  
 If all time is eternally present  
 All time is unredeemable.  
 [. . . . .]  
 What might have been and what has been  
 Point to one end, which is always present.  
 Footfalls echo in the memory  
 Down the passage which we did not take  
 Towards the door we never opened  
 Into the rose-garden. (1.1–14)

Past, present, and future merge, “all time is eternally present,” and the theme of time is ultimately linked to place, that is, “place and time-and-eternity” (Leimberg 65). In Eliot’s poem the garden is a place revisited that is both present in memory and in experience; revisiting this place evokes memories, and “memory is the place where time past and time future are present” (Leimberg 72).<sup>7</sup> In Pearce’s novel the garden is the place where time future is contained in the past insofar as Tom already lives in Hatty’s memories of the past; interestingly the passage about the door that leads to a rose garden in Eliot’s poem has been associated with another classic of children’s literature, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, and with Alice’s wish to enter the garden she can only see through the little door after her fall through the rabbit hole. In Eliot’s poem the speaker is called into the garden, and the entering of the garden becomes the entrance to “our first world” (1.21–22), which implies paradisiacal notions that also emerge in Pearce’s text.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Eliot stresses the notion of memory, that is, “the realm of possibility and loss through time that is unique to individual memory” (Klein 26), which is also an affective memory. In *Tom’s Midnight Garden* memory likewise works as the means to unite different strands of time. “Only in time” can things “be remembered” (Eliot, “Burnt Norton” 2.85, 88), and “only through time time is conquered” (2.89).



When Tom sees someone's epitaph in the cathedral of Ely—he reads that the person “had exchanged Time for Eternity” (184)—he plans “to exchange ordinary Time, that would otherwise move on towards Saturday, for an endless Time—an Eternity—in the garden” (184). But his plan fails; as a matter of fact, it must, for only “through time time is conquered,” and Tom cannot close “the gap between time and eternity” (Malkoff 251). He cannot escape time, which becomes evident to him when, after visiting the cathedral they meet young Barty, who gives them, that is, Hatty, a ride home. During their journey Hatty seems to forget about Tom, and Tom starts to think “of Time: how he had been sure of mastering it, and of exchanging his own Time for an Eternity of Hatty's and so of living pleasurably in the garden forever. The garden was still there, but meanwhile Hatty's Time had stolen a march on him, and had turned Hatty herself from his playmate into a grown-up woman” (196).<sup>9</sup> By the end of the journey, Hatty does not even any longer see Tom; and the following night the garden is “no longer.”

#### *The End of Eternity*

When Tom, expecting to run into the garden that night, actually runs into dustbins, he cries for Hatty. He suffers from a shock at his discovery that he cannot enter the garden anymore. The next morning he is expected to apologize for making so much noise and goes upstairs to Mrs. Bartholomew. This is when Tom finds that Mrs. Bartholomew *is* Hatty and that he was able to enter her dreams of the past, her memories, and thus also her past.<sup>10</sup>

During their conversation Tom learns that he cannot stop the course of time and that he cannot exchange “Time for Eternity,” although he is able to experience things past: both to the young and the old only a shadow of eternity is granted. The most revealing sentence by the old Hatty is that “nothing stands still, except in our memory” (212); Hatty knows that from experience: on the last night before her wedding, during the storm, and before the fir tree fell, she thought that the garden would never change, but she then saw that it did, and this is why Tom heard a “cry

of horror.” That the fir tree falls in the night before Hatty's married life begins has a symbolic quality: it marks the end of her childhood, the end of her stay at her aunt's—and thus also the end to her playing in the garden. She has to leave the paradise of her childhood.

Her cry was caused not only by the shock and alarm at the moment of falling but also by her realization that even her garden, like everything, is subject to change and to time. This constant change even results in the garden's full disappearance in Tom's present, where it has been replaced with houses. However, Tom at first does not understand and thinks that all that happens in the garden is somehow reversible because, when he enters the garden the following night (in his present), he sees the tree towering above the garden as it had before the storm.

He furthermore realizes that what for him is only a few hours each night and, eventually, the time span of a school holiday is for Hatty more or less her whole childhood and youth and thus covers years: “I shall see you tomorrow,” said Tom. Hatty smiled. “You always say that, and then it's often months and months before you come again.” “I come every night,” said Tom” (146). Because this, from Hatty's experience and point of view, is not the case, during each of Tom's visits “her secrets and stories [pour] from her with haste and eagerness as though she were afraid that Tom's company would not be hers for long” (81); to her Tom's company actually never does last long, and she yearns for company since her cousins would not play with or listen to her. Time, thus, has a very personal quality; “Time travels in divers paces with divers persons,” as Rosalind puts it in *As You Like It* (3.2.299–300). And she goes on: “I'll tell you who Time ambles withal, who Time trots withal, who Time gallops withal and who he stands still withal” (300–02).

In the course of the story, Tom comes to regard time both as his friend and as his enemy: “It [the grandfather clock] would tick on to bedtime, and in that way Time was Tom's friend; but, after that, it would tick on to Saturday, and in that way Time was Tom's enemy” (153). This image of time implies a strong ambivalence in

Tom's perception of Time: it brings him nearer the moment he has to leave the garden, and he "hated the clock for that" (151). At the same time he wants the clock's secret to be revealed and longs "for the minutes and hours to pass quickly" (151): "Time was so long from now until then; so short from now until Saturday" (151). Hence there is a stark contrast between time in the garden and in the Kitsons' flat. While Tom knows that he need not worry or care about time in the garden, he is all the more conscious of it during daytime.

Pearce presents us with a subjective and magical, not linear, movement of time; it is through dreams and memories that one can overcome time.<sup>11</sup> However, this magical quality is not restricted to time but is also linked to place.<sup>12</sup> The garden appears to Tom—and turns out to be—a magical place, yet it is, simultaneously, a place that is real: "The garden was the thing. That was real" (29).

Tom's midnight garden is thus represented as "a world unto itself: [. . .] everything one could possibly imagine or desire in a garden is there" (Wolf 143), and it is Hatty's company that makes "this garden a kind of kingdom" (83). Tom and Hatty show a fascination with the garden that, particularly in the form of the walled garden, has a long tradition in children's literature: Alice wants to enter a walled garden, and all her adventures in Wonderland start with this longing; Mary in *The Secret Garden* has a similar desire. The place is hence shaped not only by the wall, trees, flowers, but also by human company and the friendship between two children. Hatty and Tom are somehow destined for each other, though not in the sense of Hatty and her future husband, Barty.<sup>13</sup> They need each other, and it is this need that makes the transition of time limits possible: theirs is a relationship that transcends time but is also determined by time. Tom's desire to have a garden "creates" one for him, and Mrs. Bartholomew notices that during the summer she felt a "longing for someone to play with and for somewhere to play" (214).<sup>14</sup> Their longing for friendship makes them find each other, and in the end this friendship even

overcomes the age gap between Hatty and Tom when they finally meet outside the garden. As Aunt Gwen observes: "He hugged her good-bye as if she were a little girl" (217).

Through her dreams of her childhood, Hatty has attained a second childhood based on memories, while Tom even forgets to be a detective when he is in the garden. The reliving of her childhood and youth very much resembles Scrooge, who likewise "re-live[s] certain key moments in his former life" when he is visited by the Ghost of Christmas Past (Prickett 60).

The garden is a world of play; its "favourite time [is] summer, with perfect weather" (49).<sup>15</sup> It is a place of mutual giving and taking: Tom teaches Hatty to climb trees, and Hatty shows him her secret places in return. And it is also a mysterious place: Tom is weightless and invisible to almost all humans, except Abel and Hatty, yet he can be seen by all animals: "If he were invisible to the people in the garden, he was not completely so at least to some of the other creatures. [. . .] Birds cocked their heads at him, and flew away when he approached" (51). All things are immaterial to him, "without substance" (52); he can even walk through doors and leaves no footsteps on the grass. Nevertheless, he can wear the skates because they also exist in his time, and he takes them with him from the present into the past, namely, into the garden.

That there is a magical or even supernatural quality to the garden is particularly perceived by Hatty, to whom it is also a sort of retreat from her aunt's household. She actually plays with the notion of the garden's magic: in the glass-paneled door of the greenhouse is an engraved pane of glass through which one cannot see anything. Hatty thinks this "best of all [. . .]. You look and see nothing, and you might think there wasn't a garden for you; but, all the time, of course, it is there, waiting for you" (80). Tom and Hatty "see through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12), but they do know that their garden, that is, their paradise, exists. This proves to be true, for after all those years and the disappearance of the garden in the real world, it is still there, in Hatty's memory.

*Credible Fantasy: Narrative  
Voice and Focalization*

Most of the story is told through Tom's eyes, including his perceptions and feelings, as when he notes, "The stillness had become an expectant one" (19), as well as his reasoning and disbelief: "Thirteen? Tom's mind gave a jerk: had it really struck thirteen? Even mad old clocks never struck that. He must have imagined it. Had he not been falling asleep, or already sleeping? But no, awake or dozing, he had counted up to thirteen. He was sure of it" (19). Thus the reader is able to follow Tom's thoughts one by one while he weighs all the pros and cons.<sup>16</sup> The effect of following his argumentation is that the reader understands him and thinks like him; he or she may hence find it likewise a curious idea that a day should suddenly have "twice thirteen" hours (20). The reader's belief in Tom is enhanced by his own skeptical reaction to the supernatural events. There are no hints in the story that he invents his experiences and the nightly events in the garden: this makes him and his experiences credible; the fantasy earns our belief, and if it did not, it would fail.<sup>17</sup>

Yet not only is Tom's disbelief described but also his pondering about time and all the questions he asks in this context. He so very much wants to understand, and by following the story so does the reader. Shortly before Tom has to leave the Kitsons, he asks his aunt: "What is the time, please?" 'Nearly four o'clock.' Was that all?" (153). Tom expects secrets and mysteries to be linked with time, yet in the real world the answer to "what is the time?" is not the revelation of a secret but the down-to-earth statement "nearly four o'clock." "Was that all?" expresses Tom's disappointment that there apparently is nothing more to time. Yet to him, more and more understandably, there is.

The meaning of time and its passing becomes clear to him when after his last night at his aunt and uncle's he wakes up and realizes that he will not be able to reenter the garden:

Sometimes before in his life, Tom had gone to sleep in disappointment or sadness, but always he had woken up to a new

day and new hope. This time he found that the morning was only a continuation of the night and the day before: even as his mind stirred awake, the horror and grief of yesterday were already there. This was Saturday; he had lost his last chance; he had lost the garden. Today he went home. The tears fell from his eyes, and he could not stop them falling. Aunt Gwen came to him early [. . .]. Now, at last he wanted to tell her—to share and perhaps thereby lessen his grief. But now it was too late [. . .]. He gazed at her in silence, and wept. (205–06)

He feels "horror and grief," he realizes that he has "lost his chance," and he weeps: the intensity is conveyed both through the choice of words and the conveyance of feelings through Tom as focalizer. Through him the reader participates in the discovery of the garden, Tom's adventures with Hatty, and eventually in the loss of the garden. Time has simply gone on passing, although he wanted to stop his own time by spending it in the garden: "The passage of time means that everything must change, so that everything must die; [. . .] if the past can still be entered by people in the present, then it is not yet over. That represents a triumph over death" (Nodelman 8). This triumph, however, is not possible. Tom loses the garden and cannot eternally overcome time with its help but has "to accept the inevitability of time's passage" (Nodelman 10).

There are only a few instances when Tom's viewpoint is interrupted by the voice of the narrator, which, whenever it intrudes into the story, proves to be omniscient. In one of the first instances, he tells us that "Mrs. Bartholomew was asleep and dreaming" (23), which belongs to a knowledge that goes beyond Tom's. Thus there are instances when important information is given that cannot, however, be Tom's and goes beyond his immediate experience. When one reads the book a second time, this simple statement gains deeper meaning and can be seen as a first hint that Mrs. Bartholomew's dreams are essential to what Tom experiences during the night.

The second comment of this kind occurs when Tom starts his second exploration: "She [Mrs. Bartholomew] was lying tran-

quilly in bed: her false teeth, in a glass of water by the bedside, grinned unpleasantly in the moonlight, but her indrawn mouth was curved in a smile of easy, sweet-dreaming sleep. She was dreaming of scenes of her childhood" (38). Thus the narrator hints at what is happening already very early in the course of the story and furthermore directs the reader's attention to particular events, as when Tom is standing at Hatty's window, looking over the garden, he does "not linger over this view, but later he had cause to remember it" (134).

Although Tom himself finds that "his story was too long and too fantastic for belief" (206), fantasy as such is not introduced "until Chapter III when Tom gets out of bed at midnight"; until then Pearce's presentation stays within the realm of a "recognizably ordinary world of England in the mid-twentieth century" (Wolf 143).

Tom enters Hatty's dreams, which can bridge a time gap of more than sixty years. After a few nights in the garden, Tom comes to the following conclusion: "The garden and its surroundings, then, were not, in themselves, outside the natural order of things; nor was Tom alarmed by his own unnatural abilities. Yet to some things his mind came back again and again, troubled: the constant fine weather, the rapid coming and going of the seasons and the times of day, the feeling of being watched" (55). In its being fantastic Pearce's novel is credible, and the world Tom enters is not an alternative world to reality but an extension of it; it lies somewhere between the fantastic and psychological realism. Thus fantasies, dreams, and memories do not merely reflect reality, but their contents become reality.

Hatty remembers her childhood and especially her time in the garden with Tom as an ideal state of being. Because of this, her memories become affective, which leads to their being so lively and vivid. The affective quality of Hatty's memories also explains the fact that there is almost always fine weather in the garden. The garden as a place to be remembered is thus determined by emotions, which usually results in a loss of factuality. This, however, is not the case in Pearce's novel: the events are real because they are

experiences shared and remembered by two persons; the garden is thus a place both of experience and of memory.

Tom can move between past and present, and Mrs. Bartholomew also can, at least in her dreams. At the same time, there is movement toward the future: Mrs. Bartholomew's dreams are memories in which Tom appears from the future. Through sharing the experience of the garden with Tom, she makes it available to him and hence to *his* memories. Thus the garden is brought back to life, both in Hatty's memory but also in Tom's reality: "That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been" (Eccles. 3:15).

Hatty's memories in her dreams are both a nostalgic return to her childhood and a foundation of her friendship with Tom, which, paradoxically, becomes part of her future. It should in this context be remembered that the clock moves only because of Mrs. Bartholomew, who winds it. Tom once watches her winding the clock (36). As long as she lives, the clock is ticking, and hence the heart of the house beating. She can therefore be regarded as "a sort of Father Time figure" (Rees 43) who is responsible for the ongoing ticking of the clock. Thus the clock is the means both to overcome time and to indicate its progression; it links the past and the present just as Hatty's dreams and memories do, and it is the magical contact between the girl Hatty and the boy Tom, as much as between the old woman and the young boy, that makes the garden eternal. This magic enables them to overcome temporal boundaries.

Tom's Midnight Garden and  
the Time-Slip Novel

Although by sending her protagonist back in time Pearce follows the earlier example of Edith Nesbit's *The House of Arden* (1908) and its sequel *Harding's Luck* (1909), and also her contemporary Lucy M. Boston's *The Children of Green Knowe* (1954), she then varies this idea in that she neither has a character from the past enter Tom's present nor does Tom merely travel into the past. In *The House of Arden*, for instance, the latter is the case; and

in Lucy M. Boston's narrative, characters from the past actually enter Tolly's, the protagonist's, present world. Pearce, however, links the existence of Tom and Hatty through her memories of a past that is simultaneously a part of Tom's present life.

What happens in the novel is neither rationally explicable nor logically possible. Their friendship is brought about through magic, based on their shared longing for company. Tom does not look for a treasure, like Edred and Elfrida in Nesbit's *The House of Arden*; it is basically his psychological makeup that enables him to travel back in time (cf. Lehnert-Rodiek 63)—and, one might argue, also Hatty's (in her case it is even double for it concerns both the girl in the past and the old woman in the present). They are able to meet in the Victorian garden because of their solitude and wish for a playmate.<sup>18</sup> Time travel is caused not by an external factor but by Tom's (and Hatty's) wish to play in a garden. Because of the concurrent "reality" of the past and the present and their coexistence through Hatty's dreams, "there is more preoccupation with the notion and nature of Time in *Tom's Midnight Garden* than in most so-called time-shift fantasies" (Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear* 105).

Critics have noted that the "time-slip novel," such as *Tom's Midnight Garden*, became hugely popular in the 1950s and explain this mainly in the context of the aftermath of the Second World War and the destruction of many historical sites in its course (cf. Hall; Lucas xix). Time-slip novels are supposed to guarantee "personal and cultural continuity" (Hall 154).<sup>19</sup> Through Tom's eventual memory of his summer in the garden with Hatty, her memories of the garden will live on.

The novel leaves all questions open as to how such a travel back in time is possible at all (cf. Lehnert-Rodiek 63). In *Tom's Midnight Garden* "an ostensibly realist past is introduced in a realist present" (Gavin 159). Nevertheless, time travel in Pearce's novel is not historiographical (cf. Kullmann) but "owes more to Victorian novels than to 'strict' Victorian history" (Gavin 162). It is rather a story about two people who befriend each other and find their paradise in a garden that no longer exists in the

present. Thus the "fantasy and the fantastic have an end in themselves. The fascination with the past; the belief in the power of the imagination, wishes and dreams; the joy of making up stories" (Lehnert-Rodiek 64). This "end in itself" of the time-slip story of *Tom's Midnight Garden* is what makes it so different from the other novels of that genre: everything that happens serves not some higher aim but rather the well-being and contentment of a girl, an old woman, and a boy who long for company.

#### Notes

*I wish to express my thanks to Prof. Matthias Bauer for discussing with me the manuscript of this essay and also to Mike Cadden for his helpful comments.*

1. Hall likewise refers to both Boston's and Pearce's texts in her essay on the house and the garden in "time-slip" stories.

2. "It was a fairy tree!" said Aunt Gwen, returning with desperate playfulness to her first suggestion. 'Goblin woodcutters laid it low, didn't they, Tom?' (60). Tom's insistence on the reality of the fallen tree shows that unlike C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, where the fantastical world the children enter is a world of fairy tales, in *Tom's Midnight Garden* the garden is part of reality because it is a part of a real and historical past.

3. Aers calls this "dream time" (78).

4. "In the semicircular arch above the dial stood a creature like a man but with enormous, sweeping wings. His body was wound about with something white. His face was a round of gold, and his feet were of the same colour and were planted on either side of the clock-dial. One foot seemed to stand on a piece of grassy land: the other went into the sea—Tom saw painted fishes that swam round the creature's foot, and seaweed. In one hand he held a book, opened towards himself" (37).

5. Tom and Hatty have this discussion quite early in their friendship when she asks him what it is like to be a ghost (105), and they start to argue because they both think that the other is a ghost.

6. Tom's leaving his slippers in the door when he goes downstairs has a similar function. It becomes clear that he does not dream his nightly wanderings in the garden, for he sometimes finds himself in his room but has not entered the flat through the door: "He was about to climb into his cold bed, when he remembered the bedroom slipper that wedged the flat

door open. [. . .] He got the slipper, shut the front door and went back to bed" (148).

7. Leimberg continues: "The places to be revisited are select ones, charged with the presence of past and future, connected with the elements of personal existence, felt to be meeting places, places of accepting and being accepted, visiting and being visited, points of intersection where 'the unseen eyebeam crossed' and experience is full of meaning, in other words, places of recognition" (75).

8. The image of paradise and the garden as Eden is evoked both through the tree itself and its fall; Tom comments that the garden for him is "a kind of kingdom" (83).

9. Jones states that Tom does not notice Hatty's change: "Hatty, whom he has failed to recognize as getting older" (216), yet there are several instances in the text when Tom sees for himself that Hatty grows: "She seemed to have been growing up a good deal too much recently" (105); "She had certainly grown a great deal since those early days in the garden" (158). However, it is Peter who recognizes how old she *really* is.

10. This link between dreams and memories is likewise expressed in the introductory poem to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: "A childish story take, [. . .] / Lay it where Childhood's dreams are twined / In Memory's mystic band" (Carroll 4 [ll.37-40]).

11. In the context of *Tom's Midnight Garden* as a fantasy novel, Hatty's dreams "are as important as the clock in opening the door to the past for Tom [. . .]. The leap across the abyss of time is thus more often associated, in serious fantasy, with the power of the mind and the strength of the memory than with superficial devices" (Swinfen 51).

12. In Nikolajeva's (and Bakhtin's) terminology, the garden is a chronotope; there is an "indivisible unity of time and space" (*Children's Literature Comes of Age* 121). Time stops in the real world but goes on in a past period that is indivisibly linked to the garden. Nikolajeva would most probably even call it "secondary chronotope," for it is "a magical world with its own specific time which contrasts with our primary world and time" (123), comparable to, for example, the passage of time in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. She also states in her study *From Mythic to Linear* that "in the garden, both protagonists step out of their chronos into kairos: Mrs. Bartholomew by returning to her childhood and becoming a little girl again, Tom by going into the past" (105).

13. Pearce's novel in this respect differs from Kipling's story "The Brushwood Boy." There, two children also meet in their dreams and experience many adventures together, and when they finally meet in reality they are both adults and decide to get married because of their feel-

ing that they are destined for each other. My attention to this story was drawn by Prickett (204).

14. This desire has been described as a central feature of the fantasy genre: "the fantasy of desire [. . .] for another world [or a lost world]" (Manlove 91). The fantasy genre has been defined as the "recovery of a religious dimension permeating everyday work, an edenic return to innocence, or the recovery [. . .] of a sense of the wonder of creation" (Jasper xii). Swinfen likewise states that it is the need and desire for company that triggers the meeting of Tom and Hatty: "Unhappy and neglected, Hatty reaches out for love and companionship across the gulf of years, and Tom, who is unaware that he is responding to her need for him as much as to his own curiosity [. . .] steps in and out of the past" (59). Dunne in his *Experiment* states that desire is an important and "powerful [. . .] stimulant" when it comes to "tracks leading [. . .] to the future and [. . .] to the past" (219).

15. According to Carpenter, the "garden is childhood itself" (219). Swinfen links "the memories of Hatty's times of happiness" with the "memory of ideal seasons" (51).

16. For a detailed study of narrative voice in children's literature, see Wall.

17. Wolf states that Pearce's story is one of the few fantasies "set in the here and now" that do not "use some rational explanations to achieve credibility as does, for example, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Mary Norton's *The Borrowers*, and E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*" (142).

18. The solitary child must be "lonely and longing for company" in order to get "in touch with [. . . the] past" (Hall 155).

19. Linda Hall explains that "there was a real threat to the past" because many houses had been destroyed during the Second World War and the "past was often obliterated by anonymous modern blocks" (154) in the 1950s. This concept is at the heart of the 1998 movie version of *Tom's Midnight Garden*, in which the story of Tom and Hatty is framed by an adult Tom going to Hatty's house for the last time and witnessing it being demolished. For further characteristics of the time-slip novel and its relation to heritage in particular, see Cosslett 244.

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