

**Fiction, children's voices and the  
moral imagination:  
A case study**

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For my wife and children  
who *know*

## **Abstract**

The importance of stories in educating the moral imagination of the child provides the context for this thesis, which explores children's responses to the moral dimension of fiction. Studies in narrative psychology, literary theory and children's responses to reading also provide the empirical and theoretical background for this qualitative enquiry that compares a number of developing readers' responses to fiction in a school and classroom context. Focusing on the features that distinguish their responses to questions about moral choice and virtue in a range of stories, the thesis explores a mode of response to fiction called moral rehearsal. It identifies a range of strategies children adopt to explore and evaluate the moral world of narrative texts such as the use of moral touchstones, alternative narratives and dramatisation. It presents an original application of philosophical anthropology to the data in order to distinguish between what I call mimetic and diegetic rehearsal in children's responses. This phenomenological interpretation suggests the ways in which narratives contribute to the constitution of consciousness in the child.

Drawing mainly on school-based interview conversations, peer group talk and some children's written work about a range of fiction, this enquiry adopts an interpretive, case study approach to children's moral responses to fiction. It examines the child's perspective to produce an account of moral imagination in developing readers that illuminates a previously unexplored mode of reading – moral rehearsal - relevant to theories about the development of children's reading, literary response and moral sense. It represents a contribution to the literature on children's literary experience, the empirical study of children's reading and children's moral and spiritual formation.

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## Abbreviations

ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
CAQDAS	Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
DES	Department for Education and Science
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Science
NAS	National Autism Society
NLT	National Literacy Trust
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SOED	Shorter Oxford English Dictionary
TES	Times Educational Supplement
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

All Church documents including encyclicals and exhortations are given in italics by their Latin name. Classical texts are also given in italics followed by date of publication in a modern edition.

## Part One: Starting points

‘...a compelling narrative, offering a storyteller’s moral imagination vigorously at work, can enable any of us to learn by example, to take to heart what is, really, a gift of grace.’

Coles (1989: 191)

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

‘Stories help anchor our children in their culture, its history and traditions...moral anchors and moorings have never been more necessary.’

Bennett (1993: 12)

### 1.1 Prologue

Children’s reading and the moral imagination

The central argument of this thesis is that children’s reading has a role to play in the formation of what Edmund Burke once called the moral imagination – a power of ethical reflection that is also an intersubjective way of knowing (Kirk, 1996: 71, Guroian, 1998: 52). In addition to this, I also argue that story and the imagination, as bearers of meaning, are important vehicles by which children can be initiated into the moral and spiritual values of a culture. Literacy, I suggest, needs to rehabilitate the connection between reading, the imagination and children’s moral and spiritual lives. The focus of this thesis is therefore on children’s engagement with the moral dimension of fiction in the English classroom and the strategies children use to grasp the meaning and significance of this aspect of story.

A combination of circumstance and experience contributed to my interest in this project. As a teacher and parent I have become increasingly concerned about the loss of consensus in contemporary culture about moral principles and about what it means to be a human being and a moral person. Like others, I have also become aware of how children’s lives in contemporary society are increasingly lived in moral and spiritual poverty (see for example Coles, 1990, 2003). Many educators in both Britain and America have consistently sounded what Arthur (2002: 3) calls a ‘litany of alarm’ about children’s moral lives. This would include concerns about young male suicide,

teenage pregnancy and abortion, youth crime, alcohol and drug abuse and the breakdown of the traditional family.

#### A crisis in childhood

Recent reports like *The State of our Nation* (The Maranatha Community, 2004) which was sent to the Prime Minister Tony Blair in the same year, *Breakdown Britain* produced by Iain Duncan Smith's Social Justice Policy Group (2006) and Unicef's *Child Poverty in Perspective* (2007) all confirm such growing trends in British society. Most significantly for education, almost every aspect of this social breakdown is associated with educational failure (The Social Justice Policy Group, 2006: 53). In 2006, concerns about these continuing social trends prompted Sue Palmer, a former Head Teacher, to publish a book entitled *Toxic Childhood* (Palmer, 2006) and subsequently to circulate a letter to *The Daily Telegraph* on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2006 that highlights these concerns<sup>1</sup>. Signed by 110 teachers, psychologists, children's authors such as Phillip Pulman and Michael Murpurgo and others in the field of childhood, education and care the letter states:

As professionals and academics from a range of backgrounds, we are deeply concerned at the escalating incidence of childhood depression and children's behavioural and developmental conditions. We believe this is largely due to a lack of understanding...Our society...seems to have lost sight of their emotional and social needs...This is a complex socio-cultural problem to which there is no simple solution. (*The Daily Telegraph* 12.9.06: 23)

The authors suggest that children need to be given back 'real food', 'real play' and 'first-hand experience of the world'. Contact with significant adults and time are also suggested solutions to this 'crisis' in childhood. What is significant however, is that the problem itself is constructed in 'socio-cultural' terms with a focus on social and emotional needs. These are clearly important but it could be argued – as I do later in

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<sup>1</sup> See also the TES headline article 'Teachers pay price of "toxic" childhood' 10.3.06.

the thesis - that the contemporary crisis in childhood is in fact an existential crisis of moral and spiritual meaning.

#### The schooling of desire

In response to this crisis, character educators in the virtue ethics tradition (particularly in America) such as Ryan (Ryan and Bohlin, 1999), Lickona (2000, Lickona and Davidson, 2005), Klee (2000) and Bohlin (2005) have suggested that schools should pay more attention to children's moral formation, particularly through the teaching of literature. This is a process that Bohlin (2005) calls the 'schooling of desire':

The schooling of desire...helps teachers and students to see moral choices as not stemming primarily from a set of specific rules, skills, or moral knowledge *per se*, but rather from the particular story of one's life and the vision that animates it...excellent narrative literature invites students to experience vicariously the desires, conflicts, trials, and triumphs of characters. (Bohlin, 2005: 28, 31)

Literature, claims Bohlin, provides a starting point for the transformation of students' moral vision, their understanding of morally pivotal points in their own and other people's lives and their negotiation with competing goals worthy of attaining. In Britain, though less attention has been given to character education than in America, a growing interest is apparent in the development of National Curriculum programmes of study for Citizenship (QCA, 2004), in New Labour's charter for *Every Child Matters* (online at [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk)) and in an increasing focus on secular concepts of human rights, justice, openness and tolerance (Arthur, 2002: 148). What is clear from all these efforts however, is that such educators believe that children's behaviour can be influenced positively by schools and that character itself is something fundamental to the flourishing of the human person. Character,

is about who we are and who we become, good or bad...choices about conduct are choices about 'right' or 'wrong' actions and thoughts...it is

ultimately about what kind of a person a pupil will grow up to be. (Arthur, 2002: 2)

### Contested claims

Clearly however, in an age that finds it difficult to agree on matters of moral conduct, what constitutes “good character” will be debateable; universal principles for the moral life have become less and less easy to agree upon and disbelief in common moral ground more widespread (Budziszewski, 2003: 6 - 7). This is one reason why some researchers continue to question the claim that literature can contribute to the development of children’s characters or moral lives:

Traditional character educators have convinced some parents and teachers that merely reading stories to children will develop their characters...these people believe this with no basis in empirical fact. (Narvaez, 2002: 167)

It is also one of the reasons that I outline my own approach as a Catholic educator to the question of ethics and the moral life in chapter 1 to avoid the possibility of misunderstanding later in the thesis. Narvaez’s research, which I consider more fully in chapter 3, is constructed on the basis of a cognitive approach to children’s reading and response to stories which sometimes fails to capture its complexity and ‘situatedness’ within social and cultural contexts. For Narvaez, however, children do not understand the ‘moral themes’ in stories because of their tendency to construct ‘unique’ representations of texts on the basis of dissimilar prior knowledge. Because of this, claims Narvaez, and the tendency of readers to construct ‘multiple interpretations’ of texts, the connection between reading stories and the education of character is neither simple nor tenable (Narvaez, 2002: 158 - 159; 169). In many respects, this thesis is a response to this claim and an assertion of the power of story to influence young minds and hearts.

### Rehabilitating the moral imagination

Before I began this project and in its initial stages, stories from the biblical and fairytale literature had always been a central part of my experience as an educator of my own children. In schools where I have taught, classic stories like John Steinbeck's *The Pearl* and James Meade Falkner's *Moonfleet* – both featured in this research – form the heart of my commitment to literature in the classroom. Writing about children as moral learners or about their engagement and growth in the virtues is usually left to psychologists like Piaget (1932), Kohlberg (1963, 1980) and Gilligan (1982) with particular interests in children's cognition. My own background in psychology, literature and education has therefore helped prepare me for this project which focuses on the ethical and spiritual dimensions of all three.

Along with Bohlin (2005), others such as Vitz (1990) and Guroian (1996, 1998) – whose work I review later in chapters 2 and 3 – have suggested that stories do have a central place in the development of children's moral sense more widely, and in developing their capacity for ethical reflection. This is because stories, as I argue throughout this thesis, allow children access to a much wider moral “world” than is possible in their everyday lives; stories can also supply the imagination with important symbolic information about the shape of our world and appropriate responses to its inhabitants (Vitz 1990: 718; Guroian 1996: 2). One of my aims in undertaking this project was the rehabilitation of the connection between the imagination, story and children's moral and spiritual lives in the English or literacy classroom.

### Headline news

As a teacher and parent, headlines such as ‘Teachers pay price of “toxic” childhood’ (*TES* 10.3.06) and ‘Children to be given classes on how to be “nice”’ (*The Sunday*

*Telegraph* 6.3.05) are simply a reminder of the social realities we now face. It is somewhat surprising then, that despite this, reading researchers themselves have paid little attention to the moral or spiritual dimension of children's reading:

Although some claim that reading...stories to children will improve their moral literacy...little research has been done that bears on this question. (Narvaez et al., 1999: 477)

Outside the world of educational research however, the publication of several best-selling anthologies such as Bennett's *The Book of Virtues* (Bennett, 1993) and *The Moral Compass* (Bennett, 1995), suggests a firm public awareness of the connection between story and the moral lives of children.

#### Missing references

In relation to this, it is instructive to note that the two standard reference works on reading research, the *Handbook of Reading Research* (Kamil et al., 2000) and the *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts* (Flood, 2003) contain few indexed references to either character, morality, ethics or the imagination. Kamil's 2000 edition of the *Handbook* contains no references to the imagination at all and only three indexed pages about "morality". Neither the phrase "moral imagination" nor the word "spiritual" are given their own citations. In Flood's 2003 edition of the *ELA Handbook*, references are even scarcer; only one to "imaginative expression" and *none* to either "character", "ethics", "moral/morality" or "spiritual". This seems extraordinary for a field that has typically had text – and of course literary texts – at the centre of its research. The contemporary shift of focus from text to reader might suggest a place for concern with the moral and spiritual dimension of reading, but this does not seem to be the case.



### A contribution to dialogue

The question of how far children are likely to be influenced by what they may or may not perceive in texts has according to Hunt (1999: 7), 'been a shifting conundrum throughout children's book history'. Sometimes considered in relation to the political tradition in reading and criticism (Marshall, 2000: 382ff), this thesis is a contribution to contemporary dialogue about this question. In particular it concerns the ways in which children are influenced in the moral and spiritual domain by their reading of fiction. It is also an effort to investigate children's approaches and strategies for understanding this dimension of fiction.

### The child's perspective

Although others have studied college students' ethical reflections on stories (Coles, 1989), children's 'moral theme comprehension' (Narvaez et al., 1998) or written about pedagogical approaches to ethical reflection in the secondary literature classroom (Bohlin, 2005), there are no studies that foreground the child's perspective or contribution to the development of the moral imagination in the English classroom. Working in the qualitative tradition, I approach children's strategies for conceptualising the moral and spiritual domain in response to fiction in the classroom. By undertaking such an inquiry, I hope to provide others with additional tools for approaching this area, so enlarging our understanding of the important connection between fiction and children's moral and spiritual lives. Throughout what is essentially a teacher-researched case study, I capitalise fully on the personalistic dimension of qualitative inquiry as advocacy for the 'things we cherish', providing rich descriptions of the data for readers to study (Stake, 1995: 88, 135).

A celebration

Because I write as both an English teacher and Catholic educator working in a Catholic School, I naturally emphasise the Catholic perspective on children's moral and spiritual development. In writing, I hope I have created common ground for those without a Catholic background to approach and understand the findings from a human and personalist perspective. Throughout the thesis therefore, I have tried to emphasise the importance of children as persons with an inherent dignity and purpose. This thesis is therefore also a celebration of childhood, of children's capacities to reinvent the world, to re-enchant the life around them and to enter into the lives of others with grace, good will and perspicacity.

## **1.2 Outline of the thesis**

Four parts

The thesis is divided into four parts. "Starting Points" outlines my theoretical orientation to the topic of the research and includes a brief account of my ethical position as a Catholic educator. It is here that I also introduce the concept of the moral imagination and discuss my position with respect to readers and texts and argue for an essentially dialectical approach based on the work of, among others, Iser (1974, 1978) and Lewis (1961). Part two "The Research Process" outlines my approach to qualitative methodology drawing upon case study methods and grounded theory in the interpretive tradition of Stake (1994, 1995), Strauss (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and Bassey (1999, 2003). To reinforce this approach, I provide vignettes of the six child participants who are the subject of the main data analysis and the interpretation that follows, as well as information about the school and classroom contexts.

Rich descriptions and a ‘substantive theory’

In part three “Understanding children’s strategies”, I provide rich descriptions (Merriam, 1998: 8, Geertz, 2000: 3ff) of key processes identified in the analysis of data. These include moral touchstones, alternative narratives, dramatisation and emotion. For each of these I amplify and elucidate, using examples from the data in order to explore children’s engagement with the moral dimension of fiction. These chapters form the basis of the main interpretation developed in chapter 10. Part four is entitled “A context for moral rehearsal” because it is here that I set out what amounts to a ‘substantive theory’ grounded in the qualitative data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 33 - 35). I use the term “moral rehearsal” to conceptualise a way of seeing the data and develop my interpretation on the basis of an original application of Wojtyła’s (1976, 1979, 1981) phenomenology of the person. I also discuss the issue of gender in this chapter in the context of recent research into gender differences in children’s approaches to literacy and reading.

I conclude with a ‘modest proposal’ that concerns the contemporary relationship between literacy and the moral imagination in which I discuss some important landmarks in the field of new and critical literacies. I also outline the original contribution of the thesis to the literature on children’s moral and spiritual development and to research on children’s reading and literary experience.

## Chapter 2

### Ethics and the moral imagination

‘To play well the scenes in which we are ‘on’ concerns us much more than to guess about the scenes that follow...we think...we know the play. We do not know the play. We do not even know whether we are in Act 1 or Act V...The playing it well is what matters infinitely.’

Lewis (1951: 49)

#### 2.1 Introduction

Our shared moral sense

Contemporary society now finds it increasingly difficult, if not impossible to agree upon a consensus about matters of moral action and being (Kreeft, 1990: 28, Veith, 1994: 58ff). Because of this, I begin by outlining assumptions I bring to the research about ethics and the moral life. I also introduce concepts that I use later to frame the debate about the moral dimension of literature and those I consider important in a study such as this that focuses on the child’s moral imagination. Most importantly, as a Catholic I concentrate on an orthodox understanding of the moral life derived from the classical and Christian traditions of the West. This is a broad position that recognises the shared moral sense universal to all persons and that develops throughout their lives, irrespective of culture, class, race or creed. I leave key concepts in theoretical approaches to the imagination, narrative and reader response until the next chapter.

Common distinctions

In general usage, the adjective ‘moral’ is derived from the Latin *moralis*, itself a rendering of the Greek *ethikos*, or ‘ethic’ (OED: 1a). It carries a variety of senses, but commonly refers to ‘human character or behaviour considered as good or bad...the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil, in relation to the actions,

volitions, or character of responsible beings' (*SOED*: 1a). However, although this might be a generally accepted definition, distinctions between "right and wrong" or between "good and evil" are much more likely to be considered debateable, especially in the contemporary climate of relativism and post-modern thought (see, for example, Budziszewski, 1999: 5ff; 2003: 4 – 9, Kreeft, 1999: 15ff).

## **2.2 The drama of the moral life**

The exercise of human freedom

Clearly however, "moral" also implies agency and choice – 'capable of choosing between right and wrong' (*SOED*: 5b). For the purposes of this thesis, "moral" will be taken to be concerned with both human conduct especially as it is portrayed in literature or story, but also with questions of what constitutes "right or wrong" behaviour or the nature of "good and evil", a concern of interest and importance to all persons. Throughout this thesis, I also use the term "moral value" or "moral values" to suggest this concern. Within the classical tradition, the moral life is directly related to questions of human happiness, the meaning and purpose of human life and to the exercise of conscience and virtue towards the fulfilment of the purpose and meaning of human life. It is therefore concerned with the *drama* of the moral life, with the exercise of human freedom and with the search to make decisions that are right or in accord with objective moral reality (Jaroszynski and Anderson, 2003: 40). From a Catholic perspective, the context for the whole of the moral life however, is love and the love of persons (Wojtyla, 1981, Ratzinger, 2002):

The person, through its own action and the action of another person, becomes the object and subject of responsible love. The person is an actor in the drama – *dramatis personae* – in which it writes 'its truest history', the history of love or its negation. (Wojtyla, 1981: 13 *introduction*)

## Making choices

The image of a drama implicit in this conception of the moral life links the ethical search to that of narrative itself, so often the dramatisation of imaginary journeys within which characters must make decisions that affect the outcomes of the story. Indeed, in this conceptualisation we must choose between alternatives, even if one of the choices is not to act at all and the decision is more than anything else an internal and personal act. In making such decisions, ‘we are not merely changing things...we are changing ourselves’ (Jaroszynski and Anderson, 2003: 29). Our freedom demands that we choose, but the burden of such choices is the knowledge that we may choose badly. Such knowledge precedes outward action and consists of the thoughts that we entertain about the possibilities before us – thoughts that may themselves be considered ‘interior acts’ as distinct from outward actions (Wojtyla, 1981: 22 - 23):

Thoughts by themselves do not always result in actions. Some thoughts even occur against our will. Other thoughts are merely hypothetical experiments, as when we consider various scenarios, as we consider what would happen if we acted in certain ways. (Jaroszynski and Anderson, 2003: 37)

Such thoughts are the kinds of acts of imagination that make it possible for us to rehearse actions before acting and to exercise the agreement of planned actions with our conscience. In this sense, the heart of the moral good is the agreement of our decision with our conscience and the way to such agreement is the practice of virtue in the face of our choices. We follow our conscience because it is the only “moral compass” we possess by which we can judge particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil (*Catechism*, 1994: 1777, Jaroszynski and Anderson, 2003: 39).

### Developing the conscience

It is precisely the argument of this thesis that reading and responding to fiction has an important place in the moral lives of children, for whom the development of such a “moral compass” – such a conscience – is vital to the responsible exercise of freedom. It is the role of the child’s imagination in dramatising the exercise of the virtues and the working out of fictional choices that is the special focus of this study. If the moral life can be seen as a kind of drama in which choices between good and evil really exist, then both in everyday decisions and in the entertaining of fictional ones, the basis of these decisions will be the ability to imagine oneself in the role of actor or agent for whom there are real goods and real evils at stake:

...all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness.  
(*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965: 13)

This thesis is therefore concerned with young people’s search for meaning and with the kind of reflexive, ethical enquiry that young people undertake in considering not only how a person should behave but why, in accordance with what ‘larger scheme of things’ (Coles, 1997: 153). The thesis examines the child’s perspective on imaginative aspects of narrative fiction that deal with “the moral” and is therefore concerned directly with the formation and exercise of what might be called the moral imagination.

## 2.3 Virtue and character

### Defining the virtues

Central to this conception are the virtues which are at the heart of what is also sometimes called “character”, or habits of conduct (Booth, 1988: 8). Aristotle understood them as settled dispositions to act rightly and divided them into

intellectual and moral virtues, of which justice and friendship are two examples (*Ethics* 1955: 53 - 54). They are acquired by effort and are the result of morally good acts and have traditionally been divided into four “cardinal” or hinge virtues – prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude - and, at least in the Christian tradition three “theological” virtues – faith, hope and love (Kreeft, 1992: 71ff). The virtues,

allow the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends towards the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers, he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions. (*Catechism* 1994: 1803)

However, within this conception there is also an important difference between doing a virtuous action and being a virtuous person, and when it comes to “character” what we usually mean are settled dispositions that can be applied in different circumstances. The virtues can also be described as those perfected abilities of man as a spiritual person that tend towards the objective reality of the good, or forms of moral excellence that enable man to attain the furthest potentialities of his nature (Pieper, 1966: 6 – 7, Meilaender, 1984: 6ff).

#### Virtue and children’s literary experience

According to Bennett (1993: 11), without the knowledge and practice of virtue, children will be ill-equipped to meet the moral challenges of our time or to respond with genuine goodness to the world around them. Because of the importance of the emotions and the imagination in the moral life, the *affective* nature of literature (Ryken, 2002a: 29) and the literary experience of children may therefore have a role to play in providing them with “images” of virtue that have the ability to nurture their moral lives. This is because fiction communicates and dramatises imagined realities and takes “worlds” of reality and human experience as its starting point, presenting them to readers in ways that have the potential to shape a response (Ryken, 2002b: 146).



## Story and moral character

Narratives can also dramatise circumstances, present human actions and suggest the motives that inform these actions. Because of this, stories may have the potential to provide the child with opportunities to rehearse the kind of moral evaluation that assumes man's freedom as a moral subject and that suggests, as the *Catechism* does, that human acts are either objectively good or evil. Stories may also provide opportunities for the child to evaluate the extent to which fictional characters participate in the virtues – what Pieper (1991: 9) calls 'the realisation of the human capacity for being' and what the *Catechism* (1994: 1804) itself calls 'the fruit and seed of morally good acts'. Equally, they may also provide opportunities for the child to evaluate those failures of genuine love that harm man's nature and injure human accord (*Catechism*, 1994: 1872).

It is part of the argument of this thesis that literature, and particularly fiction, has a role to play in dramatising the virtues within the context of imaginary worlds in ways that make them recognisable and even attractive to children. In addition, I would suggest that such dramatisation can create the opportunity for children to entertain perspectives both within and outside of what Lewis (1943a: 17) calls the *Tao* or objective moral order, allowing them to imaginatively dramatise for themselves alternative perspectives upon the lives of fictional others and upon their own lives by the exercise and education of their moral imaginations. This process, I suggest, takes the form of a kind of moral rehearsal about the choices confronted by characters within narratives and to this extent constitutes a particular mode of response to narrative text.

## 2.4 Sources of morality and the perspective of the other

Freedom and the authentic good of persons

Moral acts can also be defined as expressing and determining the goodness or evil of the individual who performs them; to the extent that they are deliberate choices, they give moral definition to the person who performs them (*Veritatis Splendor*, 1993: 71).

The relationship of man's freedom with the authentic good depends here upon viewing the person as,

the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end...the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love. (Wojtyla, 1981: 41)

This personalistic principle or *personalistic norm* is opposed to any utilitarian conception of the person based on a subjective understanding of the good in terms of pleasure and self-gratification (Wojtyla, 1981: 38).

In this tradition, teleological theories that also define the morality of human acts on the basis of their consequences are rejected in favour of an approach that defines the morality of human acts as dependent 'primarily and fundamentally on the "object" rationally chosen by the deliberate will' (*Veritatis Splendor*, 1993: 78). This echoes the argument of the *Catechism* (1994: 393) that there are certain kinds of behaviour that are always wrong to choose (or that are 'intrinsically evil') because choosing them involves a disorder of the will - that is, a moral evil. They are acts which cannot be ordered to the good of persons. Examples of such acts would include, for example, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and voluntary suicide or 'whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture...slavery, prostitution and trafficking in women and children' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965: 27). As Pieper puts it,

to do what in reality is right and good presupposes some knowledge about reality; if you do not know how it is with things and how they stand, you are *in concreto* (practically) unable to choose what is ethically good. (Pieper, 1991: 52)

Such prior knowledge, it could be argued, depends upon contact with reality – and a reality that is not merely subjective – and with the lives of others as they are lived out in the everyday choices we all have to make. Indeed, some knowledge of how others have acted in different circumstances and the reasons why they have done so will go some way towards this, though it will not necessarily help us answer the question ‘which way should *I* act?’ faced with similar choices.

The perspective of the other

Most significantly, John Paul II’s formulation concerning the morality of human actions in *Veritatis Splendor* renders that of Aquinas concerning the necessity of understanding the perspective of others in order to grasp or appreciate the morality of certain actions defined by their object:

In order to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself *in the perspective of the acting person*. (*Veritatis Splendor*, 1993: 119)

The reason for this is that this allows us to see both the moral effects upon the individual of freely chosen objects, as well as the distinction between the integrity of the person as a rational being and the object itself, existing independently in an objectively ordered world. Without this emphasis, John Paul argues, it would be impossible to affirm the existence of an ‘objective moral order’ and to establish any particular norms for moral action, the content of which would be binding without exception (*Veritatis Splendor*, 1993: 126).

The dramatic perspectives of fiction

However, it is precisely the dramatisation of the perspective of others and their moral actions that fiction potentially renders so accessible to children and to adults. Narratives, I suggest, dramatise the ability to distinguish human actions in the context of their objects and the overall purposes and meanings attached to them by their agents in ways that allow the reader privileged access to what are often unspoken and inaccessible, though everyday processes. The dramatic perspectives on character and moral actions offered by narratives have the potential to render the objective moral order and its potential violation and destruction both vivid and memorable for the child. They also have, it should be clear, the potential to dramatise individuals' different perspectives on such a moral order in ways which make the human condition both concrete and accessible.

## **2.5 The problem of cultural relativism**

The need for basic values

The morality of such acts, it could be argued, can be evaluated precisely because of the existence of an objective moral order, without which human acts are merely relative to the one who perceives those acts and therefore defined according to time, place and individual. Notions of cultural relativism, however, presuppose the absence of an objective moral order. Observable differences in cultural norms of morality (though used to demonstrate the relativity of moral norms) can only demonstrate differences in opinion about what constitutes an ethic of behaviour or outlook. Cultures are not morally infallible and do not differ radically about values (Kreeft, 1994). In fact,

there is strong agreement across cultures on basic values...for a universally known natural moral law. What culture has ever valued lying, cowardice, theft,

murder, injustice, or selfishness and disvalued veracity, courage, justice, respect for life, and unselfishness? (Kreeft, 1994: 75)

It is modern culture, argues Kreeft that is the exception to this in its disavowal of chastity, fidelity, and piety - three things valued by almost all previous cultures. If good and evil are merely relative terms, then there is no basis for any statement about the relative merit of one kind of goodness over another, or of comparing individuals or societies either across time or place. In this sense, moral progress of any kind is also rendered meaningless (Lewis, 1943b: 250).

#### Words and reality

In fact, I would suggest that the morality of human acts depends on the object chosen, the end in view or the intention and the circumstances of the action (*Catechism* 1994: 391). In the evaluation of such sources of the acts of morality, the tradition of John Paul II or the *Catechism* presupposes an objective moral order that grounds our moral lives in a reality that can be apprehended through reason and yet that reveals itself to us in our participation in word and language and through decision-making and action (Pieper, 1988: 15, Pieper, 1989: 8). ‘Freedom’ says the *Catechism* ‘makes man a moral subject’ (1994: 391), but it is reality conveyed through human words and language that provides our knowledge of this freedom, of what it consists and therefore of how we may or may not act.

For this reason words and language have a profound place in communicating a sense of reality, and in a sense of defining reality for us – especially what constitutes a moral reality and how it should be understood to operate within our lives and the lives of others. In fact, for Pieper, ‘words convey reality’ but they always do so within an

interpersonal dialogue because human speech and communication are fundamentally interpersonal (Pieper, 1988: 15 - 16).

## **2.6 The influence of cognitive-developmentalism**

### **Virtues as labels**

Not all theorists, however, would accept the importance of concepts like virtue and personal example in the development of moral character and behaviour. For some, like Kohlberg (1980) for example, encouraging the child in defining his or her moral goals through theoretical reasoning about 'difficult ethical problems' is the solution to what Kohlberg sees as an over-concern with the conforming behaviour characteristics of traditional approaches to moral education (Kohlberg, 1980: 74, Kilpatrick, 1992: 87). The reason for this is that, as Kohlberg rightly suggests, the way children and adults behave is often not congruent with what they know or what they think. Seeing the virtues (and vices) merely as labels by which people award praise or blame to others, Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental approach to moral development has had enormous influence on moral educators, teachers and researchers. However, it has also been the subject of extensive criticism by for example, Vitz (1990), Kilpatrick (1992, 1997) and Gilligan (1982).

### **The golden rule**

In considering his theory, it should be noted that extensive field studies and direct observations of children's moral lives and responses to situations and literature by, for example Coles (1986a, 1989, 1990, 2003), do not always sit well with the kind of tests devised by Kohlberg. These tests are meant to measure certain kinds of abstract moral thinking and give adults and children a chance to offer hypothetical responses to made-up scenarios (Coles, 1986a: 29). Indeed, while maintaining the importance of

the effort amongst psychologists such as Kohlberg and others (e. g. Piaget, 1932, Peters, 1981, Gilligan, 1982, Hoffman, 1984, Damon, 1988) to understand the mind's moral development theoretically, particularly in childhood, it is clear that Coles' observations of children such as Ruby Bridges (e. g. Coles, 1986a: 25 - 29) show children capable of moral actions that defy cognitive sophistication as the measure of the moral life (Vitz, 1990: 716). I would suggest that it is the capacity of the child (and of the adult) to enact the "golden rule" – to do to others as he or she would be done by – that is the touchstone to the moral life, not the capacity to reason about when nor how to do so.

#### Decontextualising virtue

Kohlberg's rejection of the notion of traditional virtues is also problematic, despite that fact that he claims that his approach to moral education avoids the sort of "indoctrination" that is sometimes the target of cultural transmission models of moral education (Kilpatrick, 1992: 83). Far from being a morally neutral approach, Kohlberg's model – still exercising a powerful influence over both educators and researchers – is mainly predicated on cognitive development as the measure of moral development and a rejection of natural law or a morally objective order such as that suggested by *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) or Lewis (1943a, 1943b). Despite this, Kohlberg's stage development scheme still relies on traditional concepts of virtue, in particular, that of the cardinal virtue justice and what he calls 'culturally universal' principles (Kohlberg, 1980: 74). These, however, are detached and abstracted from the contexts in which they have traditionally existed – the authority of religious traditions, families and the fabric of social relationships that are, as Coles (1986a, 1990, 1997) has shown, so important to children's moral lives.

### Promoting relativism

In fact, the goal of moral development for Kohlberg (1980), is the individual's autonomous effort to define moral values and principles that have validity and application apart from the authority of the group and persons holding these principles and apart from the individual's own identification with these groups. The natural law, however,

is indelibly inscribed on the human heart. This does not mean that we cannot transgress it, or even deny it through certain theories or ways of life. Yet the natural law always asserts itself in the yearning for truth and goodness, and in the awareness of the other. (Pinckaers, 2001: 111)

Kohlberg's model, I would suggest, when used as the basis for the moral development of either children or adults communicates the idea that moral dilemmas are what the moral life is really about, and that the solution to the moral life is whatever solution to such dilemmas can be justified by reasoning. It is, in effect, a programme for promoting moral relativism in which the individual is autonomous, encouraged to define their own values irrespective of family, culture or tradition (Kilpatrick, 1992: 85).

### Authentic autonomy and natural law

This notion of autonomy itself, however, is not without precedent in the Western tradition where at the heart of the moral life we find the principle of a 'rightful autonomy' of man, the personal subject of his actions (*Veritatis Splendor*, 1993: 63 - 64). This autonomy however embraces the natural moral law as it is expressed in particular families, cultures and traditions and this distinguishes it from Kohlberg's higher stages of autonomous moral reasoning. Because the natural moral law is universal it illumines reason and directs its work by permeating cultural forms and systems of ideas, inspiring their variety and evolution. Not only this, but it also



provides a common standard beyond the distinctions of nations, class, races, times and cultures against which to make the kinds of moral distinctions that inform our everyday choices (Pinckaers, 2001: 111).

## **2.7 Stories and the imitation of other lives**

An ancient tradition

For the child, one of the best ways to develop a healthy moral life – habits of good behaviour towards others – is a life based not on legalistic principles or rules, but on other lives (Kilpatrick, 1992: 98ff). Identifying with and learning to imitate someone who already practices the virtues such as courage and love was also the way suggested by Plato in *The Republic* for the training of a child's character (Lee, 1955). It is an approach that, according to some (e. g. Bennett and Delattre, 1978, Kilpatrick, 1994, 1997, Klee, 2000) lends itself well to the use of stories or narratives that provide vicarious experience of a much wider moral world and detailed descriptions of specific and contextualised moral experience. This is because narratives allow us to stop talking about the moral life and to point to it instead (Vitz, 1990: 718ff). This includes, of course, the virtues and the reason the virtues are so “healthy” is that they are in harmony with objective reality and correspondence to reality is the principle of both health and goodness (Pieper, 1989: 72).

Vicarious experience

It is the argument of this thesis that narrative fiction provides an important means by which children can enter imaginatively into the drama of the moral life and the virtues, giving them in turn opportunities to vicariously enact a range of roles involving moral choices and the exercise of virtue and to become conversant with the ways in which these are related and with how such choices are lived. The importance

of narrative to the moral life more widely is the subject of the next section in which I explore theoretical concepts important to understanding the development of the child's moral imagination and the potential place of narrative in this process.

## **2.8 Instructing the conscience**

A power of ethical perception

According to Kirk (1996: 70), the phrase “moral imagination” has its origins in the writing of Edmund Burke and refers to what Burke calls ‘superadded ideas, furnished from the wardrobe of a moral imagination, which the heart owns, and the understanding ratifies’ and which are necessary ‘to cover the defects of our shivering nature, and to raise it to dignity in our own estimation’ (Burke, 1790). In his discussion of Burke’s notion, Kirk explores the significance of Burke’s ideas. He suggests that by ‘moral imagination’, Burke was referring to a power of ethical perception especially as it is exercised in poetry and art, and one that draws on concepts that are themselves rooted in centuries of human consciousness shaped by the cultural and religious traditions of the West:

it is the moral imagination which informs us concerning the dignity of human nature; which instructs us that we are more than naked apes. (Kirk, 1996: 71)

Conscience to conscience

The role of literature in this process is to teach us what it means to be genuinely human as well as to teach human beings their true nature, their dignity, and their place in the overall scheme of things (73). In other words, literature has a role to play in communicating a sense of the meaning and purpose of human life as a whole. This ethical function of literature Kirk sees as enacted by readers – and especially young readers – at the level of conscience such that a conscience may ‘speak’ to another

conscience in the process of reading (69). This is similar to a point made by Meilaender (1984: 69ff) that what he calls 'the instructed conscience' develops in response to a way of life that includes stories and traditions that communicate an imaginative vision of the moral life that is not a theory, but a narrative that embodies an ethic of virtue.

#### Culture and imagination

For Kirk, the normative power of literature rests in its ability to transmit culture and value within such wider contexts of families, religious traditions and schools. But it is essentially the sense of wonder that imagination engenders, combined with the knowledge that we are moral beings that makes Kirk's prescription convincing. Indeed, it is imagination, according to Kirk that is the moving force in private life and in public – the basis of our choices, the basis upon which we strive for one thing rather than another. The moral function of imagination is therefore both to preserve cultural norms and to pass them on to others. It is also to perceive those norms that make for human dignity and worth as against those that tend towards the degradation of the human person, towards the debasement of man against the standards of ethical and spiritual life embodied in the Judeo-Christian tradition (Kirk, 1996: 73).

In a sense, Kirk's concern with the loss of imagination in contemporary cultural life seems at odds with the current popularity of much fiction and film. However, what Kirk argues for is a restoration of the connection between the world of the imagination and the moral or ethical life more widely. Without a specifically *moral* imagination he suggests, it is more difficult for young people to develop the habits of virtue that nurture character and that provide the basis for justice in the wider culture (Kirk, 1996: 59 - 60).

## 2.9 The dramatic perception of reality

The drama of choice

The primacy of the imaginative life in the life of culture is also the concern of other contemporary commentators in the field of education, literary and cultural studies. Kilpatrick (1992: 208), for example, suggests that the moral imagination is concerned with things as they ought to be and takes its guidance from a willingness to grasp reality and conform to it. Inherent in this conception is the idea that reality does not usually just conform to our wishes, but that moral growth results from an ability to conform to objective moral reality – either the natural law or its embodiment in a religious tradition. Like Kirk, Kilpatrick links the development of the moral imagination to a literary tradition that assumes the existence of a morally ordered universe and the importance of restoring that order when it is violated or debased (209), a tradition that would include, for example, Shakespeare, Dante, Dickens, Flannery O'Connor and ancient drama. The assumption of the existence of an objective moral order underlies both Kirk's and Kilpatrick's understandings of the moral imagination. Like Lewis, the idea that moral reality is purely subjective would be alien to their thought, and to the thought of the Judeo-Christian tradition as a whole:

...the doctrine of objective value...[is] the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are. (Lewis, 1943a: 16)

In the realm of the imagination, it is the ability to perceive or grasp such realities that is the heart of Kilpatrick's notion that the dramatic conventions of story can provide the education necessary in helping the young to develop this capacity. A story dramatises the choices its characters make, their motives for doing so, the consequences of their choices and yet provides – if it is a good story – a believable

world in which these choices are enacted. Of singular importance to this process is the way in which stories reinforce the belief that we have a role to play in life and that discovering this role is fundamental to the motivation we need in order to act well. Morality is not merely a matter of keeping rules but of playing roles and needs to be set within a narrative vision if it is to remain morality and to make sense (Kilpatrick, 1992: 197).

This focus on the importance of the roles that stories offer children and young people for consideration can even provide, according to Kilpatrick (1994, 1997), a potential means to the kind of moral transformation that is accompanied by a transformation of imagination. By vicariously participating in stories and identifying with characters we gain the kind of perspective that offers us the hope that in the stories of our own lives we too can make good or right choices. For children and young people he reminds us that:

We've forgotten that children are motivated far more by what attracts the imagination than by what appeals to reason. We've forgotten that their behaviour is shaped to a large extent by the dramas that play in the theatres of their minds. (Kilpatrick, 1994: 21)

#### Imagination as theatre

The theatrical metaphor is a powerful and important vehicle for understanding both the imagination and more specifically the moral imagination. It can, and should be linked to the Burkean vision of manners as well as Kirk's prescription of normative instruction that literature provides. In the theatre of the imagination, literature offers the child a 'wardrobe' of imaginary roles, each with its own costume, customs, manners and dress. This is especially so with the literature of other ages where the imaginary world may reflect the preoccupations of its time, including those particular

to historical societies and cultures. As a ‘speaking picture’ (Sidney, 1989: 212ff), the literature of other ages and other cultures can provide valuable insights into roles unfamiliar to the child, furnishing further material for ethical reflection and instruction.

Stories I suggest, can provide many opportunities for children to see just how well others do or do not play their part in a drama, the plot of which they did not write and which has an ending to which they contribute but which, almost inevitably, they cannot control because it is determined by the writer. By participating or identifying with characters confronted by choices within the context of such a drama, children may have the opportunity to experience vicariously the ramifications of such choices and the moral courage or cowardice of characters that make them. This is why the dramatic nature of stories may enable children to rehearse moral decisions – to live vicariously through them, to consider them as part of the drama and to learn something of the meaning of playing a part in an imaginary “world” that like reality, contains many challenges to our own selfishness and greed and in which we find ourselves cast against our will (Kilpatrick, 1992: 24).

## **2.10 Virtue and the shape of narrative lives**

The power of storytelling

A similar point is made by MacIntyre (1981: 216ff) in his discussion of the teleological character of ‘lived narratives’. Here he likens our own lives to the lives of characters in a fictional narrative who do not know what will happen next, but whose lives nonetheless have a certain form which projects itself towards the future. For MacIntyre, man is essentially ‘a story-telling animal’ who enters human society with one or more roles into which he or she has been drafted. Part of learning and growing

up for the child, he argues, is coming to understand what these roles are and how others respond to them. One of the best ways to do this he suggests is through exposure to stories, particularly the fairy tale, the classical stories of Greece or Rome and the biblical narratives. Clearly, many other kinds of stories might be helpful for children in introducing them to what he calls 'the drama into which they have been born', but in each case they offer opportunities for the child to learn what parents, siblings and others are and what kinds of characters exist in the world around them. To deprive children of such stories, he argues is to leave them 'unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words' (216).

#### Narrative and authoritative communities

Indeed, for MacIntyre, the moral life is unified by narrative in the sense that narrative provides a means whereby the moral life is lived out - whether to success or failure – and the metaphor he develops about this is that of the 'narrative quest' in which the good (however this is perceived by the individual and the society in which he lives) is sought through the exercise of virtue. Each person is therefore a *viator* – always on the way (Meilaender, 1984: 38). This is an important insight because it locates the practice of narrative art, the reading of narrative and the living out of the 'narrative quest' within the particularities of what Colson (2003) refers to as 'authoritative communities' - living traditions such as those provided by families, communities, schools and religious affiliations:

the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities such as those of the family, and neighbourhood...without those moral particularities to begin from there would never be anywhere to begin. (MacIntyre, 1981: 221)

It is important to note however, that such particularity need not define the limits of the moral imagination, nor of the narrative structures that give meaning to the search

or “quest” for moral purpose and direction. Indeed, in the Western tradition, competing narratives would not be considered merely relative because of the existence of the universal narrative given in the biblical traditions of both East and West. Lewis (1940a: 81) expresses this clearly in his discussion of Christianity and culture when he says that ‘...culture is a storehouse of the best (sub-Christian) values’ from which it is possible to pass from imitation to initiation. By this Lewis is suggesting that culture – and narrative fiction should be included in this – has a role to play in initiating the imagination into both moral and spiritual values.

## **2.11 Educating for virtue and character**

Stories as moral resources

The role of narrative in educating the virtues is also considered by Guroian (1996, 1998) in relation to the development of the moral imagination through reading stories. According to Guroian (1998: 20, 33), stories are important resources for the moral education of children. Our society, he says, is failing to provide children with the kinds of experiences that nurture and build the moral imagination and is failing to pass on to children a strong and abiding sense of what is “good, beautiful, and true” (3). This kind of imaginative life is important, he suggests, to the full development of a child’s moral self.

Like Pieper (1989: 52 - 53), he links the virtues to the development of knowledge about reality, a knowledge that is the result of a communal endeavour. It is hard, suggests Pieper, to make ethical choices without some knowledge of what constitutes goodness because the ‘...precondition for *every* ethical decision is the perception and examination of reality’ (52). The solution, for Pieper is prudence – the art of making the right decision based on the corresponding reality – and this he suggests is



developed in relationships and communities in which wisdom about objective reality is nurtured and passed on between morally responsible individuals.

Clearly, stories in this context could provide children and young people with many opportunities to encounter reality vicariously and for Guroian, the role of the imagination in this process is to nurture an intersubjective and relational way of experiencing and knowing (Guroian, 1998: 52). This would suggest that stories might provide opportunities for children and young people to learn about moral reality on the basis of relationships imaginatively encountered within narratives, as well as on the basis of the reader's own relationship with the text – their own cognitive, affective or moral responses to the narrative.

#### Literary experience and moral correspondence

It is central to the virtue tradition of moral education that the roles of reason, memory and tradition should not be neglected in the moral formation of the child. The imagination however, should always be guided by reason, sound memory and the common accumulation of human wisdom about the world and its possibilities. The moral imagination suggests Guroian, as a power of perception that can “see into the nature of things”, is a process by which the self makes metaphors out of images given by experience and then uses them to find and create moral correspondences in further or future experience (Guroian, 1998: 24, 141).

His definition provides a useful starting point for the study of the moral imagination of the child, its perceptual power, its ability to seek connections, possibilities and correspondences between reading stories and the child's experience of the world. In this sense, it is the exercise and use of metaphor that is one of the distinguishing

features of the moral imagination, the ability of the child to find inner connections of character, action and narrative. Further, that moral character or virtue can be experienced vicariously and imaginatively through stories like the fairy tale. This is important as it suggests that for the child, the relationship between reading and the development of the moral imagination may depend upon the nature of the engagement the child has with the text as well as the degree to which he or she is able to enter vicariously into the experience of others.

## **2.12 Implied hypotheses**

### *A role for the reader*

Despite these important suggestions, however, there is no attempt in Kirk's nor Guroian's work to elaborate upon exactly how or why these imaginative processes of the moral imagination take place with individual children (Meilaender, 1999: 2), nor how they contribute specifically to children's imaginative growth. Guroian's hypothesis about moral correspondence, however, does suggest that the narrative material of stories may provide the basis for the making of metaphors useful in some way to the child when encountering real life moral experience. It also suggests an active role for the child as reader in making or constructing metaphors or comparisons in response to reading stories, though exactly how this is accomplished he does not explain, nor supply any examples from children's reading.

### *A place for children's voices*

With the exception of the work of Coles (e. g. 1989, 1990, 1997) who focuses mainly on college students, throughout the theoretical literature on childhood and the moral imagination, the voices of children themselves are conspicuously absent. There is little sense of how they articulate the concerns that are important in their moral and

imaginative understanding of the world, particularly with reference to the reading of stories. This thesis is a contribution to ensuring that their perspectives and voices are represented in the debate.

## **2.13 Summary and conclusions**

### **Key concepts**

In this chapter I have presented concepts I consider important to the genesis and development of the research design and that form the basis of the central argument of the thesis. In particular, I have outlined the classical and Western natural law and virtue traditions of the moral life in so far as they are relevant to an understanding of the importance of narrative in the life of the child and the adult. I have also outlined a conceptual understanding of the moral imagination based on a theoretical position allied to this moral tradition.

Key concepts in the approach to the moral life that I propose include the drama of the moral life, the virtues, sources of morality such as intentions and consequences, conscience, the perspective of others and the search for meaning and purpose. These concepts all inform the research analysis and the interpretation of materials presented from the research findings in later chapters. In addition, I have highlighted important conceptualisations of the moral imagination that include the notions of ethical perception, cultural transmission, imagination as theatre, metaphor and moral correspondence.

### **Exploring children's strategies of response**

Clearly, the discussion focuses on the theoretical potential of narratives to shape the moral imagination and children's moral response to fiction, but as I suggested earlier,

little empirical evidence is given in these conceptualisations to confirm or expand on these suggestions. The voices of children themselves, their own articulations of the dramatic nature of fiction are almost entirely absent from the positions I have stated. Because of this, the heart of this thesis is an exploration of strategies in which children's imaginative responses to fiction reveal and enable them to shape a moral response. It therefore takes up an exploration of the empirical basis of children's moral imaginations and how they are potentially shaped by narrative. In the next chapter I outline important conceptual approaches to the imagination, literature and readers' responses to literature that inform the research. I also examine a range of contemporary studies that throw light upon the problem of fiction and the child's moral imagination.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Narrative, imagination and children's response to fiction**

'Imagination is a power of perception that sees into the ethical nature of the world through inner connections of agents with their acts.'

Guroian (2005: 71)

#### **3.1 Introduction**

A framework for analysis

In this chapter I consider the role of the imagination in both literature and thought and relate important aspects of the imagination to the moral life drawing on insights from literary theory and narrative psychology. I also consider the theoretical place of the imagination in the ways in which readers – and particularly children – respond to narratives. In order to develop this framework for the analysis of children's responses to story that follows in later chapters, I also consider the relationship between readers and texts and explain how I understand this. To do so I draw on both reader response theory and literary theory more widely. I then set this within the context of contemporary approaches to children's reading development and relevant theoretical and empirical research about children's response to fiction. My initial research questions then provide a conclusion to this review of relevant literature.

Untested claims

A number of key studies and theoretical papers on children's reading response provide a context for the shape of the inquiry and for understanding the findings that I discuss in later chapters. In the field of contemporary educational and reading research, however, there are (as far as I am aware) no studies that concentrate from the child's perspective specifically on the development of the moral imagination in relation to fiction. There are also no studies concerning the ways in which individual

children organise and articulate responses to specifically moral or spiritual aspects of fiction, especially in a classroom context. In fact, the notion that stories can facilitate the development of moral imagination, moral thought or even character through providing vicarious experience of an array of moral situations and choices is relatively untested by contemporary research (Vitz, 1990, Narvaez et al., 1999, Leming, 2000, Narvaez, 2002).

### **3.2 The importance of narrative to children**

#### Familiarity and event sequences

Narrative is known to be important - indeed special - to children's development for a range of reasons. In their recent review of studies about narrative representation and comprehension, Graesser et al. (1996: 171 - 173) suggest that narrative discourse for example, is easy to comprehend and remember compared to other discourse genres such as persuasion or exposition, partly because its content is often more familiar than other forms of discourse. Another reason for the ease with which narrative is understood is that it depicts event sequences that people directly enact or experience and that provide the basis of more abstract representation and reasoning (172).

#### Narrative and imagination

Narrative is also closely linked to oral literacy, the development of spoken language and a range of important cognitive skills that include formulating hypothetical possibilities for events, taking roles and making knowledge-based inferences (172 - 173). Narrative, as a 'primary act of mind' might also be considered important for the way in which it can act to heighten consciousness - especially through the reading of fiction - isolating and analysing human action and experience (Hardy, 1977: 12). Children's responses to narrative fiction more widely are also known to provide the

means to reflect on personal experience, to imagine possibilities for children's own futures and to understand and negotiate social relationships and social problems (Martinez and Roser, 2003: 802). Literature in this sense also has an important social function in providing children with opportunities in conversation and dialogue for enriched understanding and experience (805). Clearly, from the point of view of this thesis, narrative is – or should be – implicated in this process, in the development of the imagination and in what Bruner (1986: 13) calls the 'narrative mode' of thought. It is this I argue with specific reference to ethical categories of narrative analysis and response – both written and oral.

### **3.3 The organ of meaning**

#### **Imagination and worldview**

In considering the place of the imagination in the human understanding of reality, Ryken (2000b: 57ff) suggests that the imagination is a valid form of knowing and that our culture now finds it difficult to trust the power of metaphor to express truth about reality. This is partly, I would suggest, because of the post-modern tendency to disassociate knowledge from objective truth itself (Veith, 1994: 57). It is therefore sometimes difficult, in a society dominated by material and utilitarian concerns – especially in the field of education – to reconcile the value of the imagination with that of the 'paradigmatic' or 'logico-scientific' modes of thought (Bruner, 1986: 12). Reason and imagination however, should be considered 'two hemispheres of knowing', neither of which are complete without the other (Lindskoog, 1995: 12). Consequently, it is a fallacy to suggest that a person's view of the world and of reality consists mainly of ideas:

a person's world view has a 'mythology' as well as an ideology. It is comprised of images, symbols, stories and characters, as well as ideas...such images...exercise a powerful influence over how we live. (Ryken, 2000b: 59)

The imagination – as a combination of reason, emotion and sensation (60) – has an important function in shaping the view of the world by which we make our choices and in reinforcing or challenging the values by which we live. As Coles (1989: 164) puts it, 'each of us has a story that contains our answers to the old existentialist questions'. In this sense, the imagination helps us to see and to envision our choices within a wider context of experience, goals and ideals many of which may be derived from stories that dramatise actions and values we admire and try to imitate, or that we deplore and try to avoid.

#### Unifying meaning

In fact, it could be argued that the imagination helps us to see reality from many different perspectives (Hooper, 1996: 565) and helps us connect our inner lives to the objective world of the senses. It is therefore quite unlike what is sometimes called "fantasy" - the type of imaginary world that operates as a form of compensation, fixed not upon reality, but upon pleasure, wish-fulfilment and 'flattery to the ego' (Lewis, 1952: 102-103). The imagination, says Lewis, works by a process he calls 'elaboration' to actively select, refine and temper the material of creative thought into products that – if one is a writer - have the legitimacy of art (Lewis, 1969: 290). The imagination is thus an active and purposeful faculty that attempts to unify the material of thought into meaningful patterns so endowing them with meaning. For Lewis the means to achieve this is metaphor and the imagination in this process becomes what he calls 'the organ of meaning':



For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition. (Lewis, 1939: 265)

In the apprehension or understanding of meaning, imagination has a key role – and in particular in the grasp we have upon truth or the nature of reality.

#### Imagination and metaphor

The dependence of reason upon metaphor, and thus on the imagination is also suggested when he asserts that ‘if we are going to talk at all about things which are not perceived by the senses, we are forced to use language metaphorically’ (Lewis, 1947a: 115). How we understand reality, says Lewis, is dependent on our use of metaphor. More importantly, if the relationship between the metaphors we use and the realities they suggest is merely ‘arbitrary and fanciful’, then thought itself becomes nonsensical because where it uses such metaphors it cannot or does not enable us to gain an understanding of reality (Lewis, 1939: 265). For Lewis, original metaphors such as those between ‘good and light...evil and dark, between breath and soul and all the others’ (265) are good metaphors because they express something true about the universe we live in – they allow us to imagine the universe in ways that are consonant with what in fact it is.

### **3.4 A source of understanding**

#### The light of imagination

The productive and vital force of the imagination in supplying our thought with ‘new metaphors or revivifying old’ also suggests similarities with Coleridge’s view of the imagination as a ‘modifying power’ that ‘struggles to idealize and unify’ the material of thought and that is ‘essentially vital’, bringing to life what is otherwise abstract, dry or

lifeless (Hooper, 1996: 566). This view is also similar to MacDonald's (1867) that the imagination gives form to thought in ways that depend upon the senses for expression. In particular, for MacDonald, the imagination acts as a 'light' to make the form of thought visible, and especially the inner world of the mind in the forms of artistic conception we call poetry and music, and in the ability to entertain possibilities – hypotheses which form the basis of the discovery of reality in both the sciences and the arts. MacDonald suggests that the imagination is a source of understanding and a means to the interpretation of significance and meaning, especially where 'pure intellect is straitened',

...the imagination labours to extend its [the intellect's] territories, to give it room...searching out new lands into which she may guide her plodding brother. The imagination is the light which redeems the darkness for the eyes of understanding...our interpretive imagination reveal[s] to us...[the] severed significance of...parts, and...the harmony of the whole. (MacDonald, 1867: 6 - 7)

#### Harmony and order

The synthesising, harmonising function of the imagination in revealing or uncovering thought is highly important in MacDonald's understanding. 'The end of imagination is *harmony*' says MacDonald, and what he calls a 'right imagination' will both co-operate with and work in harmony with the objective order of reality as its guiding principle (14). This view of the specifically moral imagination is reflected in Lewis' (1939: 265) thought when he states that his own view does suggest that there is a kind of truth or rightness in the imagination itself as a faculty of perception that is ordered to the apprehension and expression of reality.

### **3.5 Transcendental heroism**

#### The logic of imagination

The selective and perceptive characteristics of imagination are also discussed more recently by Egan (1992, Egan and Nadaner, 1988) who suggests not only that the logic of imagination conforms to that of metaphor, but also that the imagination is a particular mental flexibility that ‘can invigorate all mental functions’ (Egan, 1992: 36). This is made possible by the important connections between imagination, memory and emotion by which we are able to hold images in our mind of what may not be present or exist, and sometimes to allow these images to influence us as though they were present and real (3).

In allowing us to envision possibilities and to extend ourselves into the objective world, the imagination also has an important role in the pursuit of objective knowledge and in the understanding of the perspectives of others. Egan suggests that the imagination is therefore helpful in developing ‘tolerance’ or ‘the power of detachment...of proportion and perspective’ (see also Frye, 1964: 77-79 and Johnson, 1993: 198ff). In reading stories and by imaginatively experiencing what it would be like to be other than oneself the child can begin to develop a prerequisite for treating others with as much respect as one treats oneself.

#### Courage and heroic example

Egan also suggests that what he calls a ‘transcendent heroism’ is important in children’s imaginative lives, particularly when it is embodied in the lives of others. An important aspect of children’s imaginative lives, he suggests, is their capacity for associating with the heroic in a way that involves participating in heroism (Egan, 1992: 81). Children try on the heroic qualities they admire whether they are expressed

in story, music, film or real-life and in this sense stories can provide opportunities for a kind of “self-definition” against transcendent standards. There are, however, two problems with this. First, it assumes that children or students can distinguish real heroism from counterfeits such as recklessness by themselves, and that they will admire the virtue of courage without understanding the clear distinctions between good and evil that heroism presupposes – such as those provided by religious traditions grounded in natural law or what Colson (2003) calls ‘authoritative communities’. As Pieper (1991: 26) says ‘fortitude...protects the natural order of things’ and,

presupposes in a certain sense that man is afraid of evil; its essence lies not in knowing no fear, but in not allowing oneself to be forced into evil by fear, or to be kept by fear from the realization of good. (Pieper, 1966: 126)

Indeed, the virtue of courage – so much referred to by the children in this study – presupposes the kinds of distinctions that parents and teachers commonly make between good and bad actions, and yet that some children find increasingly difficult to make (Coles, 1997: 57, 135ff). Secondly, distinctions between what kinds of heroes children adopt for admiration and emulation are not made clearly by Egan (1992), for whom “revolt” against adult conventions – and presumably those embodied in adult authorities such as schools and families - is as “transcendent” a heroic quality as courage or compassion.

### **3.6 Analogue stories and choosing roles**

The construction of identity

The notion that narrative structures are important in thought, perception and imagination as well as in making moral choices is the basis of Sarbin’s (1986: 8ff) account of narrative as an organizing principle for human action. From the

perspective of psychological theory, the importance of such a principle is that it makes it possible to emphasise the necessity all humans beings have of choosing roles, the features of which can only be identified ‘...if it is known in what drama, in what story, the actor is participating’. In relation to the reading of stories, Sarbin reminds us of the adventures of Don Quixote, Cervantes’ tragi-comic knight errant and his tendency to construct the meaning of his quests (especially those ordered to the service of Dolcinea, his courtly lady) in terms of the romance literature he reads. In a similar way, suggests Sarbin,

it appears indubitable that human beings construct identities not only out of their reading, like Don Quixote, but also out of imaginings stirred by orally told tales or by the direct or vicarious witnessing of the actions of role models. (Sarbin, 1986: 17)

The stirring of children’s imaginations in response to story is an important focus of this study, and Sarbin’s proposition implies that narratives can have an influence on the development of *moral* identity through the vicarious, imaginative witness to the moral life that story provides.

The importance of prior knowledge, experience and emotion

A key feature of this conceptualisation is the creation of what Robinson and Hawpe (1986: 120) call ‘analogue stories’ in which during everyday life the individual compares their present situation, predicament or emotions to analogous experience drawn from ‘episodic’ memory or memories of personal happenings or doings (Vitz, 1990: 711). This occurs successfully, they suggest, particularly when the individual has relevant and plausible prior experience with which to create analogues for the present. In determining the relevance of such experience, the individual must construct analogue stories from them using inferences about missing or ambiguous details.

Such constructions are driven by the effort to find a useful model, or to understand probable causes for actions, behaviour or consequences.

According to Robinson and Hawpe (1986: 122), as a time-honoured method of practical guidance, analogue stories help individuals make problems or situations concrete, raise questions about causal relations, model actions and provide emotional distance for the individual so that their own story can be considered in the light of an analogue:

where practical choice and action are concerned, stories are better guides than rules or maxims. Rules and maxims state significant generalizations about experience but stories illustrate and explain what those summaries mean. (Robinson and Hawpe, 1986: 124)

Emotions, they suggest have an important place in this process in providing information about expectations and role relations, especially those that are difficult for the individual to comprehend. Clearly, as a mode of thinking, narratives drawn from the literary tradition have the potential to provide analogies for children to compare to their own experience, and from which to construct analogue stories of their own to compare both to the original story and to their own lives. As I argue throughout the thesis, fiction has an important role to play in the provision of such analogues for children.

#### Stories and narrative thinking

This kind of comparison – part of the search for a life that connects to others, one that makes moral sense (Coles, 1989: 139) – dependent as it is upon analogy, suggests an important role for the imagination in narrative thinking. In the construction of analogues, causes and consequences of actions may need to be inferred. However, they will also need to be imagined in order to contextualise existing experience and

provide the narrative links necessary to explain the connections between, for example intention and action or action and consequence. The reading of stories, I suggest, provides opportunities for children to carry out this kind of narrative thinking – a mode of imaginative engagement with text that, I argue, provides opportunities for the construction of analogue stories (similar to what in the thesis I call alternative narratives) about the moral dimensions of text – about virtue, character, motive, action and consequence. An important aspect of this, I argue, is the dramatisation of roles in the evaluation and exploration of character and virtue by the child.

### **3.7 The reading experience**

Windows on other worlds

One of the central functions of literature, according to Lewis, is that it enables us ‘to see with other eyes’ (Lewis, 1961: 137). This in turn, he suggests, addresses the question often asked about the justification of reading literature at all:

What then is the good – what is even the defence for – occupying our hearts with stories of what never happened and entering vicariously into feelings which we should try to avoid having in our own person? Or of fixing our inner eye...on things that can never exist...? (Lewis, 1961: 137)

The answer, says Lewis, is that ‘we seek an enlargement of our being. We want to be more than ourselves’. Reading stories, argues Lewis, is a way to experience the world from other viewpoints than our own; literature admits us to experiences other than our own (130ff). This enlargement, for the reader, can provide ‘windows, even...doors’ to other worlds and to the worlds of others – windows into the moral experience of others that may enable the reader to gain understanding of the moral life not gained through first-hand experience.

## Empathy and participation

Good reading, for Lewis is also an affectional, moral and intellectual activity similar to the way in which, in the moral sphere, every act of justice or charity involves putting ourselves in the other person's place and thus going beyond our own competitiveness (138). As Ryken (2000a: 23) points out, Lewis sees reading as a process that awakens a comprehensive range of human faculties, including 'perception...(metaphoric as well as visual)...imagination...affections or emotions'. In this sense, good reading may provide the child with opportunities for empathy and participation in the lives of others not easily gained in everyday life. In reading, says Lewis,

we become...other selves. Not only nor chiefly to see what they are like but in order to see what they see, to occupy, for a while, their seat in the great theatre... (Lewis, 1961: 139)

Rejecting the notion that literature should only be read to discover what is universal in it, Lewis, referring to the reading of medieval texts, suggests there is another, "better" way to approach reading:

Instead of trying to strip the knight of his armour you can try to put his armour on yourself; instead of seeing how the courtier would look without his lace, you can try to see how you would feel *with* his lace; that is, with his honour, his wit, his royalism... (Lewis, 1942: 63 - 64)

Here Lewis is interested in how reading can allow us to experience in some way the modes of feeling and thinking through which men and women of different eras have passed. This will of course, include the forms of moral thought and experience germane to particular individuals within particular cultures and times.

## Life from the inside

In this way, reading stories can provide a means to understanding the rich diversity of moral response and experience of which we are capable - good, evil and indifferent –



and which form a necessary part of the human condition. Reading stories, therefore, can allow the child to experience the moral lives of others from the inside – including the motives, intentions, reasoning and values that shape a moral act:

Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality...in reading...literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself...I see with myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself: and am never more myself than when I do. (Lewis, 1961: 140 - 141)

Lewis here points to the social function of literature, that it can help connect lives together in ways that do not diminish individuality, rather enhance it by creating greater understanding between ourselves and others. In the moral domain, literature allows us to make connections between our own and others' lives, to see how and why others make their choices for good or ill, to stand alongside them in our imaginations and discover what it means to be a moral being. In this sense it can be an initiation into the moral life.

#### Moral touchstones

How they respond to such participation may or may not inform children's lives and actions; it may certainly give them new points of reference, images, "icons" or touchstones by which they might 'interpret or sum up their own experience' (*ibid.* 3). If this is so, then literature could have a valuable function in providing the child with moral "icons" or touchstones by which to interpret their world – images of good and evil, virtue or moral choice against which to gauge future experience. Given the diversity amongst both stories and individual children, however, we should expect children to respond in diverse ways to the moral drama of stories, and to find that stories differ themselves in the extent to which they can provide such touchstones to the child.

### 3.8 Readers and texts

#### Enriching prior knowledge

Response to literature as a complex process of human understanding has become an important focus for reading researchers in the last thirty years (see for example Beach and Hynds, 1996, Marshall, 2000). In the framework I use for analysing the children's responses to stories in later chapters I assume that readers' backgrounds, their beliefs, prior knowledge and attitudes – what might be called their existing worldviews – have an influence on their understanding of texts when reading (see for example, Rosenblatt, 1938, 1985, Lewis, 1961, Iser, 1974, 1978, Booth, 1988, Pressley and Afflerbach, 1995, Kintsch, 1998). The experience of reading is therefore a function of both the ideas in the text *and* of what the reader brings to the text; indeed, the child's prior knowledge itself can be enriched by the vicarious experience provided by stories (Pressley, 2000: 549). Because of this, stories themselves can be an important source of the prior knowledge that actually assists good readers in the task of comprehension.

#### A two-stage process

In considering the relationship between readers and specifically literary texts however, the approach I adopt is close to that advocated by Lewis (1961, 1966), Ryken (2000b) and Iser (1974) in which, although readers are active in interpreting, analysing and evaluating literary works in their responses, any legitimate response to a text must be a response to something that is really there. In other words, readers' responses are initiated and controlled in significant ways by texts that by their use of particular words with particular (though often varied) meanings set certain boundaries to the limits of meaning that can be ascribed to them.

Reading could therefore be described as following a two-stage process. First, the reader tries to allow the text to assert its own meaning, or as Lewis (1961: 11, 19) suggests the reader tries to ‘receive’ the text by exercising the kind of surrender that acknowledges the objective reality of authors and their works. The first demand that any work of art – including literary works – makes on us, suggests Lewis is that we ‘surrender’, that we look, listen and receive and get ourselves out of the way. Not that this is conceived as a passive activity; in fact, as Lewis suggests, this is an *imaginative* activity that also involves an emotional response but one that is shaped by the text. In the second stage, readers fit what they have received or understood into their own system of beliefs, though they may be tempted to make a work mean or say whatever they themselves believe (Ryken, 2000b: 128).

#### Reading communities

Two helpful distinctions may help clarify the position I adopt. These are drawn from Lewis (1966) and Hirsch (1967). First, Lewis distinguishes between authors’ intentions and the meanings of texts and how these are received by readers suggesting that it is the author who intends but the text that means. Meaning, for Lewis, is located with the reader despite the fact that authors have definite intentions, but more importantly, with a community of readers such that ‘ideally true or right’ meanings are established over time, place, generation and individuals and are influenced by such things as moods, pre-occupations and stages of life. The meaning of a text, says Lewis,

is the series or system of emotions, reflections, and attitudes produced by reading it...this differs with different readers. (Lewis, 1966: 141)

In fact, in this conceptualisation, the author is not necessarily the best judge of a text’s meaning, despite the fact that he or she will have had certain intentions. This is

because the author can never be sure that the intended meaning was the same as or better than that evoked by the reader.

#### Meaning and significance

However, this does not necessarily imply that texts do not embody stable meanings – either over time or across cultures and individuals. All apprehension of meaning is dependent upon what Hirsch (1967: 24ff) calls the ‘re-cognition’ of text and to this extent all responses and evocations of meaning are dependent upon the reader’s understanding or comprehension of the text in the first place. Hirsch (1967: 8ff, 211ff) also distinguishes between the *meaning* of texts and their *significance* to individuals or cultures and communities. Meaning, for Hirsch, is an affair of consciousness, and specifically consciousness of one or more objects or things. Because of this, responses to texts should not be confused with meanings construed from texts and determined by them.

Significance however, implies a relationship between the text and the reader that changes according to reader and context: ‘Significance is the reader’s absorption of the meaning into his own existence’ (Iser, 1978: 151). This is an important distinction, because it recognises that mental processes as such - including those of imagination - have an important role to play in the apprehension of meaning, but should not themselves be equated with meaning itself – the object of those processes. This is especially important in understanding readers’ moral responses to texts and in evaluating their significance, a point I take up again later, especially in chapter 10.

### 3.9 A phenomenological approach

The quiddity of texts

Lewis' (1961, 1966) phenomenological approach which I adopt towards the reading process and the analysis of children's responses to narratives, despite its emphasis on readers and on what happens when adults and children read, is always concerned with what Edwards (2000: 332ff) calls the text's *quiddity*. That is, with what it essentially "is", "says" and "does", understood within its own historical and cultural milieu. Because of this, Lewis valued the primary encounter between readers and texts that leads to literary experience and experienced meanings; however, he also valued and recognised the importance of recovering, as far as possible the author's narrative craft and intention in order to avoid what he saw as the error of elevating the self at the expense of the author. The privilege and challenge of readership, Lewis suggests, is to transcend oneself in engagement with the text on its own terms and yet to remain oneself.

Literary encounter

Thus the position I adopt recognises the important contribution that readers bring to the understanding of literary texts whilst maintaining the integrity and authority of the text to determine meaning and recognising that meaning is stable over time, across individuals and cultures but that the significance of textual meanings – how readers respond – does change. As Iser (1974) puts it, readers' impressions of text will vary but only within limits imposed by the text. However, he also suggests that,

it is only by activating the reader's imagination that the author can hope to involve him and so realize the intentions of his text. (Iser, 1974: 282)

An appropriate and important metaphor for this process is the encounter or meeting between readers and texts that acknowledges that the reading experience of the same

text may be quite different for two different people but that this does not itself alter the fact that their differing experiences are responses to the same text which has its own objective existence.

#### The answering imagination

Lewis (1961) also suggests that in such primary literary experience we can encounter the whole range of human experience including the world of objective objects and the moral world of good and evil along with the artistic form of literature in which these are embodied (Ryken, 2000b: 115). Most importantly, for this kind of encounter to fully develop it needs to take place within an experienced dialogue in which the reader's "answering imagination" calls forth the meaning of the text by a dialectical process of reciprocation. Continually returning to the initial encounter to enlarge upon first impressions or readings, readers develop 'transactions' built upon both text and prior knowledge or understanding (Rosenblatt, 1938: 175, 1978: 16ff).

The place of the imagination in this process, referred to by Iser above, is important in the transformation of the reading of literary texts into experiences that are specific and relevant to a reader's own life and culture. Indeed, although a reader's responses to literature are an index to what they believe, feel and think – to their worldview – they can also, I suggest, be an arena in which to rehearse the contours of a different worldview and in imagination to discover how the world looks from the perspectives of others. This is a metaphor for reading I develop further in chapter 10 in examining the moral and imaginative responses of children to a range of fiction; it is a process, I argue, that is both recreative, intentional and constructive in the sense that implies the full participation of the reader.

### Identity and role rehearsal

In fact, according to Iser (1974) this participatory aspect of the reading process is related to the idea that “something happens to us” when we read. In establishing affinities between ourselves and characters about whom we read - that is in “identifying” with characters and their actions in narratives – several things happen. First, readers can be stimulated into adopting or taking on new attitudes, if only for the duration of the reading experience. Secondly, the distance between readers and events can appear to diminish such that in reading the reader may imaginatively “become” the subject that does the thinking – whether a character or narrator in a narrative. Because of this, readers may potentially absorb or “internalize” the thoughts, attitudes or beliefs inherent in texts whilst still remaining essentially themselves (Iser, 1974: 292ff, 1978: 35). Such imaginative participation can, therefore, represent an enlargement of the sense of the range of choices and habits of choice available to us, a rehearsal of roles we might or might not decide to adopt, or a preparation of who we might become - of the identity and character we may develop (Booth, 1988: 257 - 260).

### 3.10 Moral stories

#### Children’s games

A number of studies within psychological paradigms provide important clues about the responses of children to the moral dimensions of stories and the development of the moral imagination. Piaget’s (1932) early studies of moral judgement with children aged mainly between 6 and 12 years-old are intriguing and suggestive for their use of short, researcher-invented “stories” about lying, damaging others’ property and their focus on the rules of children’s games. Drawing on children’s discourse about these stories and games, Piaget relied on children’s own evaluations of situations they were

asked about such as the story of the child who breaks a cup or spills ink without meaning to. He found that even children as young as 6 years-old could take the intentions of actions into account when evaluating whether they should be considered wrong or not (117). He also found that for some children of this age, the objective consequences of actions were as important in evaluating moral actions as the intentions of actors in the short “stories”, though they found it difficult to reconcile the two or to decide upon which should take precedence in making the evaluation. Older children, however, relied on intentions more often to make their judgements about the “stories”.

#### Reciprocity

This ability however, does not develop until children become more able or are given better opportunities for developing ‘reciprocity’ – ‘a mutual respect strong enough to make the individual feel from within the desire to treat others as he himself would wish to be treated’ (Piaget, 1932: 189). An important way in which this happens is through co-operation and the mutual solidarity of children with each other. He even goes so far as to suggest that concepts of justice can develop largely independently of adult influences, provided children maintain an ‘equilibrium’ of social relationships between each other (191). This might suggest, it could be argued, that the “golden rule” is somehow intrinsic to children’s social relationships and so to the life of man, though not perhaps in the way in which Piaget – who like Durkheim rejects the notion that man has any intrinsic moral worth - would understand it (339). It does, however, suggest that for even young children the verbalisation of intentions and consequences forms a significant part of coming to understand the moral behaviour of others and that the “golden rule” is an important touchstone in children’s reasoning and evaluation of moral acts.



### 3.11 The moral life of the child

#### Contexts for the moral life

The most important studies of the relationship between the moral imagination and narrative more widely are those of Coles (1989, 1990, 1997, 2003). Coles' work, carried out over a number of years with a wide range of children from widely varying backgrounds is both contextual and narrative in nature. From interviews conducted with children in their homes, schools and communities, his studies document their responses to not only stories, but to their own lives and the lives of those around them. Stories, argues Coles, play a significant role in shaping children's moral lives and providing them with points of reference from which to relate to the wider world. In particular, for many of the children in his studies, biblical stories and the Gospel narratives are a touchstone to moral action and reflection:

In home after home I have seen Christ's teachings, Christ's life, connected to the lives of...children by their parents. Such a religious tradition connects with the child's sense of what is important, what matters. (Coles, 1986a: 34)

For others, it is the stories of the classroom like Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* or Golding's *Lord of the Flies* that gives them a voice with which to identify, a means of reflection or a moral perspective on their own situation (Coles, 1989: 37 - 38).

#### The search for meaning and purpose

The capacity of children to ask questions, to explore possibilities and to search for meaning and purpose in this process is considered extensively by Coles (1986a, 1990, 1997). Like myself, he considers the child a "moral witness" to the beliefs and values in his or her surrounding culture and for whom, just as for adults, life is often conceived in terms of a journey or pilgrimage. Coles sees the child's moral and spiritual life in terms of a pilgrimage that grows, changes, and responds constantly to

the other lives with whom the child comes into contact and who form part of the child's unique life-story (1990: 308). The role of the child's imagination in this process is an essential means to defining moral purpose. For the child,

Moral exploration, not to mention wonder about this life's various mysteries, its ironies and ambiguities, its complexities and paradoxes – such activity of the mind and heart make for the experience of what a human being is: the creature of awareness who, through language, our distinctive capability, probes for patterns and themes, for the significance of things. (Coles, 1997: 177)

A way of seeing: Empathy and connectedness

This search for meaning and purpose can be encouraged by reading stories and poems because of the child's willingness to 'embrace the imaginary' and 'to leap into one or another scenario, be it historical or contemporary, factual or fictional, and bring to it their very own moral or intellectual assumptions' (Coles, 1997: 121). Such acts of imagination can help the growth of a child's capacity for empathy – the ability to put oneself in another's shoes, to see and feel things as he or she does and to enact the "golden rule". They can also connect the child's life to that of another in acknowledgement of their existence as one whose being faces the same trials, the same drama of moral choice within the same reality of good and evil. Indeed, the concept of "connectedness" is fundamental to understanding Coles' view of the moral life of the child.

Two major determinants in developing this connectedness are the amount of social experience the child has, and the opportunity to take a number of roles and to encounter other perspectives (Coles, 1986a: 26). For the many children with whom Coles has worked, connectedness to families and the moral understanding inherent in their religious traditions is of fundamental importance. Such "authoritative

communities” of moral meaning and purpose give children ways to connect different kinds of behaviour to their sources of inspiration and their ultimate meanings and purposes (*The Commission on Children at Risk*, 2003). The report of the *Commission* concludes that children are ‘hardwired for other people and for moral meaning and openness to the transcendent’ and that such ‘connection is essential to health and human flourishing’ (2003: 1, see also Colson, 2003). Stories form essential support and inspiration in this process of connecting children to a sense of what is important and what matters; indeed, morally challenging narratives can be an effective way to introduce children to the moral life (Coles, 1986a , Vitz, 1990).

### **3.12 Moral theme comprehension**

#### Extracting moral themes

More recently, a number of studies by Narvaez (1998, 2001, 2002, Narvaez et al., 1998, 1999) have attempted to examine the relationship between children’s reading and what she calls ‘moral theme comprehension’ from a neo-Kohlbergian perspective. She carried out three studies (Narvaez, 1998, Narvaez et al., 1998, 1999) designed to test the ability of relatively large numbers of children of differing ages (from third grade to college students) from differing institutions to extract ‘moral themes’ from ‘moral narratives’ and to examine the influence of moral schemas on the reconstruction of such narratives. Despite some antipathy to “character educators” as such, Narvaez (2002, Narvaez et al., 1999) makes several key points relevant to the present study.

#### Connecting with possibilities

First, it seems clear that moral comprehension of narrative requires something beyond general reading comprehension – possibly related to children’s own moral

frames of reference (Narvaez et al., 1999: 484). Secondly, the question of background knowledge is undoubtedly important in moral responses to narrative, but as I have suggested previously, it will never be absolutely unique to the individual – we all, including children, share many common experiences and values. Thirdly, children need connectedness – with adults, other children and with the causal elements in stories in order to make any moral sense of them. Fourthly, for “moral theme comprehension” to be successful – and perhaps for stories to have a significant place in children’s moral lives – they need opportunities to imagine possibilities in response to stories by asking for example, “What could be done? What would happen if...?”. Finally, they also need opportunities to entertain an imaginative dramatisation of characters’ thoughts by asking for example, “what did the character think about when deciding about or doing the deed?” (Narvaez, 2002: 11). These are precisely the kinds of opportunities and questions this research sets out to provide for a number for children in a classroom context responding to fiction themselves, with each other and with myself as a teacher researcher.

### **3.13 Research questions**

Children’s moral response

This thesis aims to address the following research questions in the light of the literature review and the findings of the research reported below:

- How are children’s moral imaginations developed by reading and responding to narrative fiction?
- What is the role of the imagination in children’s responses to the moral dimension of narrative fiction?
- What are the key features and strategies in children’s responses to the moral dimension of narrative fiction?

In addition to this, I set out to try to conceptualise the findings in terms of a working, ‘substantive theory’ about children’s literary response and the moral imagination, a theory I present in chapter 10 as a mode of children’s reading called moral rehearsal. As the research developed, it was necessary to ask a range of questions, many of which form subsets of the questions above and which arose in the course of the research. Some, but not all of these are addressed in the chapters that follow.

### **3.14 Summary and conclusions**

An important category of children’s response

In this chapter I review literature about the imagination, its relation to moral vision in the life of the child, the importance of analogue stories to a narrative approach to the moral imagination and of the potential of literature to enable the reader to gain an enlargement of perspective about themselves and others. I consider the phenomenological approach to the experience of reading as a basis for understanding children’s experiences with literature and suggest that readers have an active role in the reading process. I also argue that the moral imagination should be seen as an important category in its own right in relation to children’s response to narrative fiction and the development of children’s reading, as opposed to an assumed, little studied part of the process. Central to this I propose an interpretation of children’s response termed moral rehearsal based upon the analysis of children’s voices in a school context.

Readers, texts and children’s lives

In considering the relationship between readers and literary texts I adopt an approach that acknowledges the importance of the reader in encounters with texts, but respects the integrity of literary texts as “worlds” of meaning which invoke a wide range of significances for different readers, both ethical and existential. I present an account of

the reading process that centres on the meaningful encounter between reader and text based on the reading and literary theory of Lewis (1961, 1966), Ryken (2000b, 2002a, 2002b), Hirsch (1967) and Iser (1974). As part of this account I make the important distinction between meaning and significance in readers' responses to texts (Hirsch, 1967, Iser, 1978).

This suggests that reading literature has the potential to enlarge our experience of reality and that reading is itself a particular kind of primary experience, not just an invitation to vicarious experience. I highlight in particular Coles' (1986a, 1990, 1997) findings about the importance of narratives to the inner lives of children as well as the neo-Kohlbergian approach of Narvaez et al. (1998, 1999, Narvaez 2002), emphasising the relevant findings of each. The next chapter sets out my own approach to the research problem.

## Part Two: The research process

‘Qualitative case study is highly personal research. Persons are studied in depth...The quality and utility of the research is not based on its reproducibility but on whether or not the meanings generated, by the researcher or reader, are valued.’

(Stake, 1995: 135)

## Chapter 4

### Interpretation in context: Research methodology and methods

‘Qualitative analysis requires a dialectic between ideas and data.’

Dey (1993: 7)

#### 4.1 Introduction

A phenomenology of persons

In this chapter I discuss my assumptions about the nature of qualitative research, the related questions of the nature and limits of knowledge in the human sciences and how these are linked to ontological questions about the nature of what *is*. From this I develop an approach to case study research in the human sciences characterized by what could be called phenomenological personalism by which the meanings and experiences of participants in research can be interpreted in the context from which they are drawn but within a realist framework that recognizes the truth and dignity of the person as defined by Wojtyla (1981). The person, in this conception:

is an objective entity, which as a definite subject has the closest contacts with the whole (external) world and is most intimately involved with it precisely because of its inwardness, its interior life. (Wojtyla, 1981: 23)

At the same time, the person as a particular *suppositum* exists in participation with others, with communities and families who are both the object and subject of their experience (Wojtyla, 1976). I then discuss the research design and strategy with reference to existing literature on educational case study, as well as ethical issues I encountered during the research, how I dealt with them and how I understand the importance of validity and reliability or generalization in qualitative research. I also describe the methods I used in data collection and analysis and consider alternative strategies I could have adopted.



## 4.2 Qualitative case study

### The child's perspective

For the purposes of this thesis, I define “research” as a process of systematic inquiry – systematic to the extent that it is carried out according to basic principles and procedures that can be discussed and debated – and a form of inquiry in that it asks questions about social realities encountered, known about or participated in by the researcher in a variety of ways. Its purpose is to understand the world better, and specifically with educational research, to understand the world of education better; as “teacher research” it is therefore oriented towards practice (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989, Freeman, 1998). The meaning of “qualitative” I take to express a concern with understanding the ways in which people make sense of the world, their lived experience of the world that takes into account the contexts in which the people themselves live and work. This would include their actions, thoughts, feelings and relationships and a focus on their unique perspectives (Merriam, 1998: 6). As this study is an inquiry into the responses of children while reading fiction, the main concerns are with the experience, perspectives and accounts of individual children in an educational context in which I act as a participant observer and the primary instrument for data collection (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Patton, 2002). It is therefore primarily concerned with the learning and development of children within a specific context.

### Naturalistic inquiry

Qualitative research has several key characteristics, including for example “naturalistic” settings as a source of data, a concern for description, process, induction and the meanings of participants’ perspectives (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). For Burns (2000: 388), the qualitative researcher attempts to gather evidence that will

reveal “qualities of life” that reflect the different worldviews and perspectives of participants in specific educational settings. Cohen et al. (2000: 137ff) suggest that the hallmarks of such “naturalistic” inquiries include the researcher as central to the inquiry, the collection of phenomenological data, hermeneutic interpretation, an emphasis on participants’ worldviews, holistic participant and non-participant observation and the move from description to explanation and theory generation in completing the research.

### Indwelling

As a teacher-researcher, I consider my own role as inquirer and interpreter close to what Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 25ff) call ‘indwelling’ – a search to understand the other’s point of view empathetically and reflectively that relies on both tacit and explicit knowledge to conduct the inquiry. At the same time, like Freeman (1998: 4 - 5), I assume that this will lead to analysis and interpretation based on – in the case of this thesis – the voices and imaginative participation of children. Because children’s responses to observers can vary with context, I devote chapter 5 to a discussion of cases and contexts before a description of findings and interpretation (Coles, 1990: 22ff).

Despite the fact that there is no single formal methodology associated with practical inquiry (Richardson, 1994: 7), I used approaches that I considered both practical and effective, but that developed over the course of the inquiry. Like many teacher-researchers – who for Hopkins (2002) are natural case study researchers - I adopted deliberate practices of reflection during the study to enable myself to generate questions about the data I collected. For example, I kept an extensive research journal in which I also endeavoured to reflect on my own engagement with existing

theory about both children's responses to reading and the moral imagination, to develop theory about the relationship between these and to consider ethical issues as they arose (Baumann and Duffy-Hester, 2000). I give examples of these reflections in the discussion that follows.

### Realism and epistemology

However, contemporary views of qualitative research as a whole – of which teacher-research forms a part - are divided about the nature of reality and as a consequence vary considerably in their respective views of knowledge and of the human person's relation to knowledge<sup>2</sup>. Eisner (1998), for example, develops an approach that is consistent with an idealist and social constructionist view of reality, shared by for example Lincoln and Guba (1985), Peshkin (1988) and Kvale (1996). Sayer's (1992) critical realism develops a view of knowledge that is intersubjectively mediated and dependent upon social practices defined by specific contexts. Others, like Hammerlsey (1992) and Silverman (2000b) reject the implicit divide between qualitative and quantitative approaches and argue that objectivity should be the aim of all social science, provided that sufficient criteria are used for distinguishing what constitutes qualitative research as such.

Hammersley (1992) recommends ten criteria against which to evaluate qualitative research, including for example the nature of the methods used, the role of theory and the adequacy of data analysis and evidence in the inquiry. Hammersley's (1992: 51ff) notion of 'subtle realism', while rejecting 'ultimate values' and the possibility we can know anything with certainty or that there exists any foundation for certain knowledge also invokes plausibility, credibility and relevance as criteria for

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<sup>2</sup> As Hammersley (1992: 62) wryly comments, 'truth' has become almost a taboo word for social scientists.

establishing the validity and worth of qualitative research. These, in their turn, however, rely upon the correspondence theory of truth in order to establish their applicability to the claims made by the research findings – and yet implicitly rely upon this kind of correspondence to reject any “absolute” correspondence between what we can know and reality. This is a point Hammersley acknowledges but it leaves him caught between the culturally and locally defined and the universal, relying upon the scrutiny of particulars to establish a consensus about the adequacy of truth claims being made by the research. Because of this, he suggests that as yet no really adequate framework for ethnography exists and still ‘remains to be discovered’ (203).

#### Meaning and experience

My own position therefore rejects what I would call a “hermeneutic of anxiety” over the question of truth and knowledge and is derived from the personalist philosophy of John Paul II (*Veritatis Splendor* 1993, *Fides et ratio*, 1998) suggested in chapter 2 and the work of Coles (1986a, 1989, 1990). Individual worldviews, subjective experiences and perspectives are the central concern of interpretive study within specific contexts, but I would suggest that reality can be known – both individual worldviews and *what is* - and each can therefore be, to varying degrees, evaluated for their truth claims. At the same time, I consider interpretive validity to be context-dependent to the extent that how individuals construe the significance of similar experiences can differ widely (Hirsch, 1967), despite the fact that individuals do not create meaning but experience it in different ways. An interest in what could be called a personalist phenomenology therefore features in the development of the analysis and interpretation of data from the children with whom I worked. Nevertheless, like Coles (1990: 342) and Piaget (1932: 7), I recognize the difficulties in generalization involved in work that is contextual and in which I am involved as a teacher-researcher. I discuss some of these

difficulties below and those related to learning from children themselves about the structure of their thinking and imagining, their values and assumptions as they undertake activities as part of their everyday schooling.

### **4.3 Research design and strategy**

#### Case study as a research strategy

Case study, strictly speaking, is a strategy for the selection of cases and the collection of data and involves the investigation of a relatively small number of naturally occurring cases (Hammersley, 1992: 185). It is considered highly appropriate as a strategy when research questions that focus on explanation – “how” and “why” questions – are the subject of a study and can be separated from both survey and experiment as alternative strategies (Yin, 2003). However, as Merriam (1998: 27) observes ‘the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case’. As a research strategy, it inevitably involves a trade-off between the number of cases and the degree of likely detail obtainable about each and the sensitivity of the study to contextual and personal factors compared with the degree of control the researcher has over these. In general, the case study has the potential to produce highly sensitive and detailed accounts of individual or collective cases. At the same time, these are typically open to criticism on account of the researcher’s influence on a small number of cases (Hammersley, 1992).

#### Advocacy and conveying credibility

The case study tradition can also be seen as a way of systematizing experience within which interpretations are handled critically to prevent them becoming merely expressions of opinion (Stenhouse, 1985: 266). The problem of appraisal and justification of what may be seen as the private beliefs of researchers is at the root of

the search amongst case study researchers for conveying credibility about their work (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), usually by the use of the critical scrutiny of evidence that meets recognized standards of ‘trustworthiness’ such as confirmability and dependability (Sturman, 1999: 109). There is no doubt though that case study research is highly personal research that relies heavily on the previous experience of the researcher and on what they consider to be of most value (Stake, 1995). As such, it can provide important evidence in advocacy for what we consider important and, in educational terms for what we consider of worth and significance.

What is a case?

In general however, two kinds of definition have been proposed by proponents of case study research – the study of an instance in action and that of what are termed ‘bounded systems’ (Bassey, 1999: 30). Stoecker (1991: 88) for example, considers the case study a ‘study of any individual persons, organizations, communities, or societies’. Walker (1986: 33) however, describes case study as the ‘examination of an instance in action’ and in terms of the study of the particular, the selective collection of information with a focus on meaning, value and intention. Hammersley (1992: 184) considers a case ‘the phenomenon (located in space/time) about which data are collected and/or analysed, and that corresponds to the type of phenomena to which the main claims of a study relate’.

This is similar to Miles and Huberman’s (1994: 25) definition of the case as ‘a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context’, itself a reflection of Stake’s (1988, 1995) notion of the case as one among others and a specific, complex functioning thing that is bounded by time or space – a ‘story about a bounded system’ (Stake, 1988: 256). In addition, Yin (2003: 13 - 14) suggests that real-life contexts,

boundaries between cases and context (though not always clear), a potentially wide range of variables influencing the phenomena, the use of multiple sources of evidence for the purposes of triangulating data and the development of prior theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis are all key features of case study research.

#### The child as a case

For the purposes of this thesis, I consider the individual child as a case with both intrinsic and instrumental interest (Stake, 1994, 1995, 2000). Intrinsic because of each child's unique contribution to the inquiry and instrumental because of his or her role in contributing to a more detailed understanding of the research questions by comparison across cases of individual children as readers. Because of this emphasis on the particular, I consider case study a legitimate form of inquiry from which description, explanation and theory can be generated within a specific context and that has some of the characteristics of art – a metaphor developed by both Wolcott (1995) and Eisner (1998) in relation to qualitative study.

#### Knowledge of the particular

Like art, case study is particularistic, descriptive and heuristic, illuminating readers' understanding of the phenomena under study by revealing the meaning of particulars and producing knowledge that is concrete, vivid and contextual (Merriam, 1998). As a result, case study research has the potential to extend readers' (or users') understanding of the range of human experience, particularly in reference to unique and even atypical cases chosen for variation in a comparative or multiple case study, such as this thesis presents. In addition to this, case studies potentially have both logical and rhetorical functions in the development of knowledge about psychological and social situations (Platt, 1999).

### Inductive patterns

As rhetorical strategies they can define, illustrate, provide mnemonic devices for future comparison of cases, stimulate empathy for particular cases, reveal, persuade and provide aesthetic and human interest for readers. Their logical contribution to developing arguments about phenomena of interest include suggesting hypotheses and interpretations for future investigations, particularizing what is intrinsically of interest in its own right (e. g. one child among many) and contributing to possible inferences about other cases and other contexts (Platt, 1999: 164ff):

Case study researchers...are more likely to be concerned with pattern explanation than deductive explanation because the pattern model is more appropriate when there are many diverse factors and where the pattern of relations between them is important. To arrive at an explanation, therefore, requires a rich description of the case and an understanding of it, in particular the relationship of its parts. (Sturman, 1999: 105)

### Trustworthiness

For Bassey (1999, 2003), the characteristics of good educational case study research include what he calls trustworthiness (sometimes referred to as issues of validity and reliability), an ethical conduct especially in terms of respect for persons, a significant research outcome for one or more particular audiences (e. g. a teacher or parent) and meaningful and readable reporting for various audiences. By trustworthiness, Bassey is following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) use for the term with reference to naturalistic inquiry, there offered as an alternative to the concepts of validity and reliability which, with reference to case study research are problematic.

Essentially, reliability refers to the degree with which a research fact or finding can be repeated, given the same circumstances; validity is the extent to which a research fact or finding is in reality what it is claimed to be (Bassey, 1999: 75). Related to these



questions are the issues of generalization (also called external validity, by for example Yin, 2003) and construct validity. Simply put, generalization means the degree to which the findings of case study research may be applied to other cases in other contexts and construct validity refers to the degree of confidence possible in the instruments and measures used to collect data (Yin, 2003: 35ff).

#### Researcher transparency

The literature on both case study and qualitative research suggest a number of ways of ensuring that research is conducted to increase the confidence with which a study becomes trustworthy. This is particularly important since critics of case study research (e. g. Atkinson and Delamont, 1985) often focus on both generalization and issues of validity and reliability as insurmountable problems tied inextricably to the central role of the researcher in the research process. Subjectivity, what Atkinson and Delamont (1985: 33) call a 'lack of methodological self-awareness' and a commitment to tacit knowledge that effectively translates in practice into private knowledge easily make the practice of qualitative case study open to charges of researcher bias and individualistic idiosyncrasy.

In my view, the key to such charges is the notion of researcher transparency combined with a rigorous approach to data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting that make it possible for others to follow the development of the analytic, conceptual and theoretical ideas of the research. Where this is combined with the creation of a case audit trail or chain of evidence, the development of a case study database and the use of multiple sources of evidence, an effective defence can be made in my view, that mitigates against the charge of bias (see for example, Bromley, 1986, Merriam, 1988, 1998, Stake, 1988, 1995, Bassey, 1999, 2003, Yin, 2003).

### Strategies to enhance trustworthiness

Bassey (1999: 75) summarises the arguments for trustworthiness in case study research using a series of questions simplified from Lincoln and Guba's (1985) account of naturalistic inquiry. These include a concern for the length of study and observations, comparison of data types and sources leading to analytic statements. They also include the testing of such statements against alternative interpretations, the sufficiency of detail provided along with the provision of an audit trail to enhance the status of the findings.

Similarly, Merriam (1998) suggests six strategies to help enhance the internal validity of case study research. These are comparison of data drawn from different contexts or of different types, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory research and identifying researchers' biases. In this inquiry, I developed many of these during the course of the sixteen months I carried out data collection with the children from my classes. Some of these strategies I adopted can be summarised as follows:

- ❖ I combined one-to-one interview conversations with small peer group talk sessions and small amounts of children's written work to ensure a range of data collection;
- ❖ I employed a range of theoretical ideas to generate categories of analysis during initial and later phases of data collection (Eisenhardt, 2002). These included, for example, the notions of "connectedness" and empathy (Coles, 1986a, 1997) and readers' "iconographies" by which they use narratives to make sense of personal experience (Lewis, 1961);

- ❖ In a few cases I was able to discuss some findings with individual children and ask them supplementary questions;
- ❖ I discussed findings with colleagues at school and from one other school;
- ❖ Several colleagues read and commented on drafts of analytic writing about the data I collected;
- ❖ I kept a research journal from 18<sup>th</sup> March 2002 to 27<sup>th</sup> May 2005 that tracks my reflections on data collection, analysis and relevant reading as a means of deepening the reflexive and critical nature of the research (Burgess, 1999, Silverman, 2000b).

#### A challenging process

However, despite the fact that I conducted the inquiry over a period of sixteen months, as my research journal shows I encountered a wide range of challenges and issues connected with not only data collection, but also with the ethical and practical aspects of engagement with children in a school setting. Some of these I think were probably a function of the prolonged nature of the data collection, some of trying to combine the roles of teacher, Head of Department and teacher-researcher.

#### The question of generalization

The question of generalization in case study research is dealt with in different ways by different writers. Wolcott's (1995: 171) somewhat glib but humorous rejoinder to the question 'what can we learn from studying only one of anything?' is 'why, all we can!' emphasizes that qualitative understanding is not necessarily dependent upon quantity of evidence. Indeed, his reminder that every person (or child as in this study) is both like all others, like some others and like no others in a range of ways is an elegant and personalist way to think about the relationship between the particular and the general

or the one and the many. Despite this, Wolcott (1995: 172) treats generalization as ‘something highly desirable yet always just beyond grasp’.

#### Analytic generalization

Yin (1994: 27ff) by contrast, considers the role of theory to be central to case study, suggesting that ‘analytic generalization’ is the way in which to generate theory from case study – that is, by using existing theory as a point of comparison with the empirical findings of a study to suggest replication or the need for new theory. Stake (1995), like Bassey (2003), expresses doubts about generalization and finds case study a potentially poor basis for generalization because it is concerned primarily with the particular, with researcher interpretation and with often very different individual worldviews. Nevertheless, he suggests that we can learn both propositional and experiential knowledge from case studies because certain descriptions and assertions about cases can be integrated into readers’ memories. For teachers, research “results” or reports such as case studies, can become part of a ‘horizon of memory...assimilated into professional craft knowledge’ (Bassey, 2003: 121).

#### Information-rich cases

Where researcher’s narratives provide opportunities for vicarious experience, readers extend their general knowledge and memories of events and individuals (Stake, 1994) – they make what Patton (1987: 168) calls ‘extrapolations’ from ‘information-rich cases’. Stake also suggests that there are different kinds of generalization – what he calls *petite* and *grande* generalizations. A *petite* generalization refers to a general or recurrent feature of a particular case or several cases – a child who repeatedly shows shyness in groups, for example. *Grande* generalizations, however, are statements about larger populations that can be modified by the findings of case studies whose participants form sub-groups of larger populations.

### Naturalistic and ‘fuzzy’ generalizations

More importantly, however, are Stake’s notions of assertions and naturalistic generalizations. Very often, because of the interpretative nature of case study inquiry, researchers make assertions about their findings that, strictly speaking should be seen as theoretical propositions or even speculation. Because of this, Stake (1995: 12) like Coles (1990) advises ‘an ethic of caution’ in making assertions about small numbers of cases, especially without clarifying the interpretive basis upon which they are made or their theoretical nature – a stance I endorse in developing a theoretical understanding of the cases of children’s reading responses I studied. This is similar to Bassey’s (1999) own concept of the ‘fuzzy generalization’ that he developed in response to concerns about generalization from cases that are often drawn (like those in this study) from contexts of immense complexity. This he defines as ‘the kind of prediction, arising from empirical enquiry, that says that something *may* happen, but without any measure of its probability. It is a qualified generalization, carrying the idea of possibility but no certainty’ (Bassey, 1999: 46). It is, therefore, a qualitative measure arising from the study of singularities which can be added to the accumulated evidence of similar (or different cases) in order to strengthen the evidence for theoretical concepts such as those I develop in this study (Bassey and Pratt, 2003).

### Rich descriptions

That the study of small numbers of cases can provide the basis for sound generalization external to those of specific cases is further explored by Stake (1995) and others (e. g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Walker, 1986, Eisner, 1998). Here the concept of naturalistic generalization is a way for this process to take place along with the vicarious experience of the reader or audience of case study research – educators, parents, researchers or policy-makers. The basis for this kind of generalization is the

ability of the reader to apply the case findings to their own circumstances, to cases they have encountered or will encounter in the future as a form of retrospective and anticipatory comparison. The researcher's role in validating this kind of generalization is to provide as much descriptive and analytical information for the reader to enable this kind of transfer across situations to occur:

Generalizing can be regarded not only as going beyond the information given...but also as transferring what has been learned from one situation or task to another...transfer is a process that has generalizing features. A person must recognize the similarity – but not identity – between one situation and the next and then make the appropriate inference. (Eisner, 1998: 198)

In this view then, case study has the potential to enable inferences between one situation and another. In later chapters I try to show how particular phenomena occur within and across several cases on the assumption that this can provide valuable and trustworthy knowledge for the purposes of further comparison (Stake, 2000). To further enable this process of extracting what is potentially universal from the particular – a process familiar to most of us through our encounters with great art and literature – I provide a range of rich descriptions (Merriam, 1998) drawn from each child's responses to a range of stories in chapters 5 to 9. I also delineate ways in which I consider the children in this study typical compared with others in the study and the classes that I taught.

#### The unity of the case

Like Stake (1988: 258) I recognize that a case study 'cannot deal with the *totality* of anything' (emphasis mine) but that, although it doesn't tell the whole story it does deal with 'the unity of the case', and the unity of the experience in ways other research methods do not. Although this may appear to contradict the epistemological views I expressed earlier, it is merely an admission of my inability to always account

for every feature of the cases within this research – a fact attested to by others (e. g. Wolcott, 1995) and by the particularity of focus of this inquiry. It is also born out by the kinds of practical, contextual difficulties attendant upon teacher and educational research, some of which are illustrated below in my accounts of the research process drawn from my research diary. It is, in effect, a plea for humility in the face of the complexity of both the human person and the nature of qualitative inquiry – not for a retreat into epistemological uncertainty. I invite readers to transfer and generalize what I consider important and central strategies, ideas, images and metaphors associated with children’s engagement with the moral dimension of fiction and to the development of the moral imagination.

#### **4.4 Data collection methods**

##### **Participant observation**

For the period in which I collected data from children at school, I considered myself a participant observer. I both participated in situations about which I was inquiring – children’s responses to fiction in the classroom – and observed these situations by developing relationships with participants (Burgess, 1984). Where children were engaged in pair or group discussions with peers, I still considered myself a participant, though less so, as I had initiated the situation and was able to listen to the children’s talk afterwards as it had been tape recorded. My participation extended to both asking questions and initiating activities as well as presenting my own views about some aspects of the fiction being studied. I also made observations of children’s talk about fiction in a variety of ways, including informally within the classroom. This is clear from my research diary where, for example, I recorded examples of class discussions about stories with children who became or were cases in the inquiry. Below I recorded how one class discussion focused on the ethical dimension of characters’

choices in Meade Falkner's *Moonfleet* with my Year 7 group of whom two pupils were cases in the study:

Studying this story with Y7 has been a treat. How much further I will be able to go is unclear as I have to hand this group over to another teacher after half term. I have had some interesting discussions with the group about the characters and their actions...The children were spellbound, even those who had read ahead and knew what would happen. Our discussions in class were very much about why John intervenes and whether Elzevir was doing the right thing or not.

(Research Journal IV, 2.6.04)

As this extract also illustrates, teacher-research has practical difficulties that cannot necessarily be anticipated – I had to give this class to another teacher who had just joined the school, so losing direct contact with two children in the study after less time than I would have liked. It also illustrates that in teacher research there is no simple division between researcher and teacher, nor between discrete, more formalized data collection activities like interviewing and the everyday work of the classroom.

#### Quality not quantity

Despite this, a summary of the main data I collected during the sixteen months of data collection at school is given in appendix 1 (adapted from Hopkins, 2002: 139) and shows clearly the six main cases of children I was interested in and the types of data I was able to collect from each. I carried out most of the data collection on the basis of the teaching and learning of fiction I was engaged in with the children in the classroom. It should be noted – a point I return to below – that I was not able to collect the same amounts of data for each child for a range of mainly practical reasons so that some cases are more fully represented than others in the database. However, using a multi-case design to generate analytic ideas and theory, I felt, following Silverman's (2000a: 828) advice to 'limit your data', that the quality of the data I did collect was more important than sheer quantity. In total, the database includes over



thirty-five interview conversations (of about 20 – 30 minutes each) and peer group discussions (of about 10 – 20 minutes each) as well as a smaller range of written responses, pictures and concept maps. The interview conversations and peer group discussions are about equally represented in the data.

## **4.5 Interview conversations**

### **Depth interviews**

Interviewing as a data collection method in both the psychological sciences and the social sciences more widely has a long history and my own approach is inspired by the small-scale studies carried out by Piaget (e. g. 1929, 1932) and the methods used by Coles (e. g. 1986a, 1986b, 1990) in studying the inner lives of children. However, although their studies use either (in the case of Piaget) an interview component, or (in the case of Coles) extensive one-to-one conversations with children, my own approach is a development and extension of what might be termed this “clinical” or psychological approach (Powney and Watts, 1987). One reason for this is that despite some one-to-one contact in the classroom with each child, work in the classroom rarely allows the kind of depth that a one-to-one interview potentially offers for entering the other person’s perspective – in this case the child’s (Patton, 1987).

### **The problem of bias**

In Coles’ studies of children’s lives, their thoughts, feelings and imaginations are allowed to speak for themselves though not without being presented as the result of a long work of reflection, editing and assimilation by Coles himself:

I have assembled remarks made by children in the course of years of acquaintance...The risks are substantial: distortion of what the children have said or intended to say; the intrusion of the observer’s, the writer’s subjectivity, if not outright bias. Under such circumstances there is a requirement of tentativeness with respect to assertions. (Coles, 1986a: 10)

The problem of bias and distortion when working with children is a constant factor in any qualitative inquiry, particularly as children's responses to an outside observer are known to vary according to child, mood, observer, time of day and even length of engagement in the study (Coles, 1990: 26). This means that, following Silverman (2000a) I am necessarily tentative about the claims I make in chapters 5 - 10 that follow, and recognize that other approaches, using other forms of data, are not only possible, but probably necessary in extending and developing the work of this inquiry. Further written data or data videotaped in the classroom, children's drawings or responses on re-reading stories might be revealing in different ways about the moral imagination. In addition to this, critical realist, feminist or socio-cultural analyses of the data I collected for example, might reveal other aspects of children's engagement with the moral dimension of fiction that I have not developed at length.

#### The child as moral witness

Despite this, like Coles I consider the child as a moral witness, a person in their own right for whom truth and knowledge are as important as for the adult and for whom connectedness to human communities is a significant factor in their development. In this sense, according to Coles 'each child becomes an authority, and all the meetings [with the child] become occasions for a teacher – the child – to offer, gradually, a lesson' (Coles, 1997: 26 - 27).

#### Purposeful conversations

Although definitions of interviewing vary in the existing literature on qualitative research, of central importance is the asking of questions through 'conversational encounters' or what might be called 'talk to some purpose' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 153). For Bogdan and Biklen (2003: 94) an interview is a 'purposeful

conversation...directed to get information' that takes its own shape and that may be used (as in this inquiry) in conjunction with other methods of data collection. The purpose of interviewing is to allow us to 'enter the other person's perspective' (Patton, 1987: 109) and to understand the experience of other people and what sense or meaning they make of that experience. Because of the situated nature of qualitative inquiry, interviewing can potentially affirm the individual but without losing sight of the communities and contexts within which they exist (Seidman, 1998). It remains, therefore, more than a data collection exercise providing 'mutual interest' and 'empathetic access' to the worlds of others (Kvale, 1996: 125).

#### Ethical concerns

Seidman (1998) develops this view, seeing 'in-depth' interviewing as both a research methodology and a social relationship that must be nurtured, sustained, and then ended gracefully. He is careful, however, to point out that interviewing, like teaching, is not a friendship though it can be friendly. He rightly stresses the central, ethical dimension to interviewing – respect for the individual, despite the fact that interviewers and participants are rarely, if ever equals. With children, this is especially important because of the differences in relative age and status. In order to create a meaningful and non-threatening context for interviewing children that enables them to be thoughtful about their experience and to reflect and imagine in informative and compelling ways, the conduct of the interview needs to reflect an awareness of the child's needs. For example, a certain style of questioning may be required, a willingness to be very patient, to repeat questions and to understand that children's language and understanding of language is not always the same as an adults' understanding (Westcott and Littleton, 2005). Most importantly, interviews with children, in my view, need to be conducted with a sense of fairness and justice that

values the words and voice of the child because those words are deeply connected to the child's sense of worth. Seidman (1998: 93) puts it well when he says that 'interviewing research means infusing a research methodology with respect for the dignity of those interviewed'.

#### The child's *life-world*

The phenomenological mode of understanding offered by interviewing is further explored by Kvale (1996) some of whose insights I adopt as relevant to this study. Interviewing, for example, aims to obtain information about the life world of the participant and the meanings of themes of importance in this world which are specific and that can be described (Kvale, 1996: 29-30). For the purposes of this study, I was interested in children's responses to fiction and so to a very specific aspect of their *life worlds*, but also to what strategies they used to make moral sense of the fiction they were reading and, in some cases how this sense related to their wider lived experience.

#### Reactivity and the semi-structured interview

Because of this, the questions of validity and reliability are constantly present in the handling of interview data. Children, in particular are known to be highly influenced by their own perceptions of the meaningfulness of the interview situation itself, thereby creating possible limitations on the reliability of their accounts (Westcott and Littleton, 2005: 142 - 144). They are also at least as prone as adults to being influenced by leading questions, the status of the interviewer, the formality or informality of the interview situation and even the interviewer's tone of voice, choice of vocabulary and non-verbal language (Cohen et al., 2000). Semi-structured, in-depth interviewing, although it has the advantage of producing comprehensive, rich data that can be systematically gathered and analysed, also has the disadvantage that the interviewer is themselves part of the process. The reactivity and sensitivity of the

interview conversation is at once a strength and also a potential weakness – interviewer effects, especially with children who can be quite suggestible, need to be taken into account in collecting and assessing the data. I recorded concerns about this several times in my research journal. For example on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003 I noted,

Interview issues:

1. “forcing” the responses, concern about “getting” through the questions in time available/getting data rather than allowing children to speak
2. “interpreting” responses in my terms because that is what I would like the children to think or offer.

(Research Journal II, 1.4.03)

Craftsmanship and authenticity

My own position with regards to this problem – essentially one of validity – is that steps can be taken to mitigate against, though never to completely eliminate such effects. Steps that can be taken, and that I took in collecting and subsequently using the data included those recommended by Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) and others (e. g. Burgess, 1985, Merriam, 1998, Seidman, 1998, Cohen et al., 2000). These included

- ❖ Attempts to validate children’s own concepts and ideas during the interview itself through variant questions, prompts and probes;
- ❖ Collection and analysis of data from at least two different contexts;
- ❖ Conducting a pilot study at home with three 10 - 12 year old children;
- ❖ A sixteen month period of extensive data collection;
- ❖ The collection of high quality data with clear recording equipment.

For Kvale (1996: 252) the essential principle of validity is what he calls the quality of ‘craftsmanship’ connected with procedures that are transparent yet evident in leading to conclusions that are ‘intrinsically convincing as true, beautiful, and good’. Close to

this is Seidman's (1998: 19) notion of 'authenticity' in which readers may have confidence due to the internal and possibly external consistency of the passages reported from interviews, as well as the discovery and learning attendant upon their reception by readers and users of the research. Throughout my work in the field I have aspired to these standards in order to ensure a high degree of trustworthiness in my findings.

#### **4.6 Pair and group talk, reading journals and written work**

##### **Peer contexts**

Because of these concerns, I invited the children in the study to take part in pair or small group discussions about the fiction we were reading in class either with each other or with peers they selected themselves. An example of these tasks is given in appendix 5. On the assumption that all aspects of a child's development are influenced by the child's social world (Feldmann, 1986), I saw the group discussions as a complement to the interview conversations because they would give greater autonomy to the children in directing their own talk and in engaging the views of their peers about the stories we were reading, their characters and moral dimensions.

I also felt that small group or pair discussions might allow children's own social contexts – as opposed to a more clearly defined teacher-lead context - to give some definition to the responses of the children in the inquiry (Ball, 1985, Edwards and Westgate, 1998). I saw this as a way of checking and comparing the kinds of concepts generated in interview conversations to examine their potential stability and therefore reliability. I also considered it possible that such a social situation without my direct presence as a researcher might encourage a greater range of ideas, the development of

shared ideas and even new ideas that may not surface within the interview conversations (Lewis, 1992).

#### Collaborative talk

Group and paired talk is a common feature of the English classroom and learning through talk is now a statutory component of the English National Curriculum (Johnson, 1994). For this reason, the children who took part were in fact more familiar with this kind of context for talk than the interview situation – it could be considered, therefore, in some ways more “natural” than the interview situation, though as a result not necessarily generative of more authentic data. Children, like adults can vary their accounts depending upon context (Silverman, 2000a) – and this could include aspects of their moral identity and moral domain, its language and imagery (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) – features of children’s responses to fiction upon which this thesis focuses. Nevertheless, the talk carried out in these situations represents another way in which the children can be seen and heard sharpening their understanding about the stories they discuss, sharing their responses and developing their own strategies of response. In some cases they are clearly learning from each other about the texts and making their thoughts or ‘inner speech’ external (Vygotsky, 1986: 142ff).

#### Conceptual stability

Clearly, the degree to which children’s concepts, thoughts and imaginative understandings of fiction remain stable across such contexts is significant, though not in my view determinative for validity, simply because although personal or subjective meanings (what Hirsch calls significances) may vary across context, truth does not even when it has many levels (Hirsch, 1967). However, as a researcher, I consider the pair and group talk a means of observation in which I am still acting as a participant

observer, though somewhere between ‘participant-as-observer’ and ‘observer-as-participant’, perhaps nearer to the latter (Burgess, 1984: 81 - 82). This is because although I was not present during the children’s pair and group discussions, I initiated the activity and tasks, asked them to record their talk and listened to the talk afterwards for the purposes of analysis. My role as participant was therefore, in this case, subordinate to my role as information gatherer (Merriam, 1998: 101).

#### **4.7 Written responses**

##### Variable data

I also asked the children involved to create some written responses to some of the fiction we were reading. In particular, two of the children from Year 7 kept reading journals about some chapters of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C. S. Lewis and two from a different class created some journal entries about *Moonfleet* by J. Mead Falkner. The two children who took part from Year 9 also wrote responses to “critical incidents” in *The Pearl* and these are included in the database. The purpose of these activities was to encourage a different form of response that engaged their understanding, their questions, speculation and developing ideas about the stories that would also allow the basis for some dialogue between children and with me as their teacher (Farest and Miller, 1993). In general, this data is patchy and though providing support for the data collected through talk, is under-represented in the sampling partly because of difficulties in ensuring that the children completed and kept the diaries and written work. It is strongest for only two of the children and so represents a limitation in the data collection and database.



## 4.8 Sample

### The pilot inquiry

The pilot inquiry I conducted took place in my home with my three eldest children who, at the time were aged 10 - 12 years of age. This would be considered an opportunity or convenience sample on the basis of strict availability (Cohen et al., 2000). Their participation in questioning and trialling of verbal reports was invaluable in gaining practice and in shaping the interview schedule I drew up for use in the school study. However, I began this pilot inquiry with an interest in the cognitive nature of children's on-line responses and comprehension of story (e. g. Rumelhart, 1980, Bereiter, 1985, Johnston and Afflerbach, 1985, Kintsch, 1998, van Oostendorp and Goldman, 1999), specifically with reference to the moral dimension of text. I combined the taking of verbal reports in response to several stories and extracts with short interview conversations based on questions I later developed into the interview guide I describe below.

However, because of concerns about the validity of verbal reports in accessing children's on-line cognition while reading (see for example, Afflerbach, 1984, Pressley and Afflerbach, 1995, Long and Bourg, 1996), and because of my preference for a broader personalist orientation to children's response to literature as both a psychological, ethical and social experience I chose to focus on developing a combination of semi-structured interviews with small group or paired talk as main data collection methods.

### Purposive sampling

The children that form the sample of the school inquiry were mainly drawn from classes I taught or from classes easily accessible to me as a member of the English

Department and Head of English. All of them volunteered for the study and so, in one sense represent a form of self-selecting participants. With the children I did select, I assumed that I might be able to discover, understand and gain insight into the research questions I was interested in (Merriam, 1998). However, I was also looking for ‘information-rich cases’ upon which to develop an inquiry from those who did volunteer (Patton, 1987: 167).

For this kind of purposive sampling (Silverman, 2000b) I chose a mixture of gender, ages, ability in reading and religious tradition – and at least one atypical or “negative” case that would help maximize variation in order to improve the potential of the study for theoretical generalizability (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Silverman, 2000b). This was a Statemented girl in year 8 with mild autism and later a girl from year 8 with quite severe behavioural problems chosen to provide atypicality in the children’s responses to fiction for the purposes of analysis (Patton, 1999). This last girl however, did not attend talk sessions sufficiently so is not included as a case.

#### Theoretical sampling

I began the project with four children who were sometimes accompanied for the pair or group talk sessions with peers. Over the next sixteen months I invited other children to take part in order to ensure I had as wide a variation as possible of cases. As I continued to collect and analyse data (at times simultaneously), I also adopted some of the principles of theoretical sampling:

the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 45)

Essential to this process is establishing confidence in the analytical work of empirically grounding categories that emerge from the data. This is so that further “slices of data” from different groups, or in this inquiry children as cases, can be compared to the emerging categories until theoretical saturation is produced and little is added to conceptual understanding by the addition of new data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In the data collection I carried out, I considered theoretical sampling important as an approach to the data and the emerging categories of analysis. It lead to an emerging “theory” or way of understanding a particular mode of children’s reading called moral rehearsal which is described in chapter 10.

#### Constant comparison

Sampling of this kind is based on developing, densifying and saturating analytic categories in a cumulative way. Comparison of incidents and events in terms of how they give density and variation to the concepts to which they relate provides a means to approach new data on the basis of emergent categories. Such comparison also makes it possible to revisit and re-analyze already collected data on the same basis in order to test for theoretical relevance rather than completeness (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In this sense, it provides a means to discover categories and their properties and to develop links and relationships between them.

A table summarizing the characteristics of the sample of children during the inquiry is given below (table 4.1). Ages, years and national curriculum reading levels given are those at the start of children’s participation; names for people and places are pseudonyms throughout the thesis. The children in bold are the main cases of the inquiry.

**Table 4.1: Sample characteristics**

Child	Year	DOB	Age	Religion	NC Reading	KS2 SAT	SEN
Rachel	7	9.8.91	11	CofE	4	4	
Darren	7	2.9.91	11	RC	4	4	
Holly	8	30.12.89	13	CofE	3	4	Autism
Gareth	8	18.7.90	12	CofE	5	4	
James	7	6.6.92	11	RC	5	4	
Anna	7	26.11.91	12	RC	5	4	
Amy	7	14.11.90	13	CofE	4	4	Literacy
Simon	7	20.11.90	12	RC	4	4	
Ben	7	2.10.90	12	RC	4	4	
Ryan	8	27.6.91	11	CofE	4	?	Behaviour
Chris	7	21.10.91	12	RC	5	5	
Sarah	7	1.1.92	12	CofE	5	5	
Kaleem	9	31.12.89	13	Muslim	5	?	
Jasmin	9	20.11.89	14	Muslim	5	?	
Natalie	7	19.4.92	12	CofE	3	2	Behaviour and learning

It should be noted that eight other children contributed to the inquiry by joining in on pair and group talk sessions. Two of these – Kaleem and Jasmin - were an Asian boy and girl from the Muslim faith community.

A basis for new understandings

Clearly, the status of the sample remains numerically small though I have argued that the evidence from such a multi-case design (Yin, 2003) can be compelling and can be the basis for transferable generalization of different kinds and for what Bassey (1999) calls ‘fuzzy propositions’. As the basis of credible theory, such a design may be argued as sufficient to develop concepts, a conceptual framework and related propositions but necessarily awaits the addition of new cases, comparison with other contexts and engagement with other theoretical orientations - not merely for ‘verification’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 234) - but for contributing further to what is or can be

substantively known about literature and the dramatic nature of the child's moral imagination.

## **4.9 Data collection in the field**

### **Ethical criteria**

In accordance with the principles of the British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines for educational research, I carried out all interview conversations as far as possible with the best interest of the child in mind (BERA, 2004). In order to conform with legislation concerning the Protection of Children (e. g. Child Protection Act 2003), I decided that I should carry out the interview conversations after school in a small room in the St Mary Centre - a Centre for Social Inclusion that was sited within the school, but which operates its own timetable. This was not used after school so provided a quiet, comfortable environment in which I could discuss children's reading with them, but that was continuously monitored by CCTV. I personally did not wish to be alone with each child on a regular basis and felt that the protection and privacy offered by this environment met the ethical criteria of a study that in itself is deeply concerned with the moral life of the child and that has implicit within it the belief that children's moral lives need nurturing and protecting (Kilpatrick, 1992, 1994, 1997).

### **Informed consent**

To obtain the consent of parents for the children to participate in this way, I sent home letters outlining the nature of the reading research I was engaged in and asking for written signatures consenting to their child's attendance after school. A copy of this letter is given in appendix 2. All parents agreed to this procedure and I met with each child at least twice for about 20 – 30 minutes. During this time, I asked for my

own security tape to be used in the CCTV recorder so that I could keep a record of all the interview sessions; this tape now forms part of the case record. I planned each interview and small group or paired talk session in advance and made a copy of the timetable available to each child and to parents. A copy of an example of this is shown in appendix 3.

Before beginning each interview – indeed at the start of each child’s participation after they had agreed to take part – I made it clear to them that I was trying to find out about children’s reading and how they responded to fiction we were reading in the classroom. I chose not to reveal specifically that I was interested in the moral dimension of fiction and response, though I did stress that characters would form a large part of our work together and a focus for interview questions. I considered this acceptable because, by withholding this information I did not consider that I was placing the children at risk of harm or danger in any way, nor that this constituted deception as such because I did not judge that they would be angered or upset by subsequently being informed of the study’s focus. I would also suggest that there is a distinction between deliberate falsification of information and withholding information from participants (The British Psychological Society, 2000).

### Confidentiality

I also did not offer confidentiality about the interview conversations – or about any other aspect of the research, mainly because I considered that this could compromise my position as a teacher in the school. In the event of a child making a disclosure of information related to Child Protection for example, as a teacher I would be expected under the duty of care and school policy to respond in the interest of the child by reporting it. Because of this, I maintained my status as a teacher, though recognize

that without the guarantee of confidentiality, some children *may* be less willing to discuss their views. Each child was also given the opportunity to withdraw from the research process at any point, a condition consonant with most guidelines on working with children in research (e. g. Ball, 1985, Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989, The British Psychological Society, 2000, Oliver, 2003). In the event, I considered the duty of care more important than data collection or even the research ‘findings’ – a stance I take throughout that is consistent with the recognition that the dignity of the child as person must be upheld throughout the conduct of educational research.

#### Further challenges

The semi-structured interview guide I developed contains a range of questions clustered around themes I considered relevant from my initial study of the existing literature (e. g. Vitz, 1990, Kilpatrick, 1994, Guroian, 1998) and from the work of Sire (1978) on understanding the worldview of literary texts. A copy of example questions from the initial interview guides are given in appendix 4. There were in addition many other practical challenges that I needed to address during the data collection period. A brief summary of these is given below:

- ❖ In interview some questions were too hard for children; at times I had to vary them adding prompts and probes to elicit further responses;
- ❖ Children would forget to turn up for talk sessions and these needed rearranging;
- ❖ I opted to record small group and pair sessions at lunchtimes in my classroom for better sound quality having tried and failed to sample classroom talk adequately;

- ❖ Small groups and pairs generally discussed what they found “fair or unfair” in stories, or “good and bad”. Sometimes they would discuss questions from the semi-structured interview guide;
- ❖ Reading journals were hard to organize with consistency. Appendix 6 shows the instructions I gave children about keeping these over a three to four week period. In general they are under-represented in the data along with other written responses.

Despite these challenges, the data I collected is rich and varied and represents the thoughts and responses of nearly fifteen children, six of whom are the focus of detailed analysis.

#### **4.10 Data analysis and *CAQDAS***

Making sense of the data

Qualitative data analysis is concerned with discovering and deriving patterns in the data collected – usually textual and linguistic –and with looking for ways in which to make sense of the data. This process involves the use of existing theories and concepts as well as techniques to develop new concepts or theories about what is contained in the data and therefore about the situations and individuals in the study (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). This process is both inductive, moving from the particular to the general and deductive, involving inferences about general themes in the data. In the generation of theory (often called grounded theory because of its reliance on the grounding of conceptual ideas in empirical data), both description, conceptual ordering or explanation as well as theorizing can be involved and most qualitative studies engage one or more of these purposes in their use of the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The key to these analytic tasks is categorizing occurrences



in the data - called “coding” by some writers - by assigning them analytic labels and linking categories to ascertain relationships between them as the basis of hypothesis generation and theory building (Dey, 1993).

#### Transcription of data

However, before this process can be carried out, qualitative data – especially data generated through talk – needs rendering into a form suitable for this kind of detailed scrutiny and confrontation. To create transcripts suitable to this purpose, I employed three different transcribers during the course of the study, as well as carrying out some initial transcription of my own as well as all the transcription of the pilot data generated with my own children. I gave each transcriber specific instructions about the layout of transcripts, as well as a model transcript to refer to that clearly distinguishes the participants by name, including myself as the researcher in the case of interviews. A copy of the instructions I gave to the transcribers is included in Appendix 7. As can be seen from this, I stressed in writing but also verbally to each transcriber that the material should be kept confidential for the purposes of transcription because I wished to protect the privacy of the children whilst the research was in progress and until I had obtained consent from them and their parents to use the data publicly for publications and discussion (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

#### A focus on meaning

To effect a transcription that was useful for analysis, I specified that little punctuation be used in the transcription because I recognize that transcription itself is a selective process and that imposing the conventions of written language upon speech might create a misleading sense of certainty about the content (Swann, 1994). In fact, it is often hard to tell where sentences begin and end with speech, and especially with the

speech of children. Despite this, meaning is still evident, as well as intention and I asked transcribers to render what could be discerned as literal meaning as well as pauses and some basic utterances that were not linguistic (like laughter) in the transcripts but only if these were very obvious. I also suggested that they avoid “comic-strip” conventions like “coz” in their renditions because these can introduce expectations about speakers into the transcriptions that are misleading (Swann, 1994).

#### Methodological trade-offs

On receipt of each transcript I always checked it by listening to the taped talk and correcting obvious errors – most of which were due to the transcribers’ lack of familiarity with the children’s voices, an advantage I could bring to the transcription process. Transcription, like all aspects of qualitative research is ‘inherently theory-laden’ (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999: 81) and because of this, it may have been preferable to transcribe all the children’s talk myself, as well as their written work to ensure a consistent and high-quality transcription. As Tilley (2003) points out, however, the methodological trade-off between closeness to the data, involvement with the data and sheer time and resources is unlikely to go away in this kind of research; for myself, the use of transcribers combined with rigorous checking of their work against sometimes repeated listening to the children’s originally taped talk provided a compromise between methodological purity and effective use of time. However, the main data remains, in my view the children’s talk of which the transcriptions are a heuristic device that makes the potentially public record of the taped talk amenable to analysis and detailed inspection. I do not consider them, however, a replacement for close and sustained listening to children’s voices with their insistence, tonal qualities, shyness or reluctance - all of which are quite difficult to capture in a written transcript (Silverman, 2000a).

## Release of the data

Near to the end of the data collection period, I also wrote to each parent of children involved in the study to ask for their permission to use the data collected with their children in both discussion with colleagues and possible publications arising out of the study such as this thesis. The reason for this was that I considered the data the joint property of myself as researcher and the children whose parents therefore needed asking to release the data to me for these purposes (Walker, 1985, Miles and Huberman, 1994). A copy of the letter and request for this is included in appendix 8. In all cases except one, this request was granted quickly. One parent requested copies of the transcripts of her child's participation for inspection before agreeing to release the data to me. Having seen the data, she then agreed to their release. I promised all the parents and children the protection and privacy of anonymity in the publication of data and work arising from the study, including this thesis; hence my use of pseudonyms consistent with children's ethnic backgrounds (Oliver, 2003).

## A creative dialectic

Analysis involves a creative dialectic between ideas and data (Dey, 1993) and in order to carry this out I adopted processes drawn from Straussian grounded theory and practices inherent in the use of NUD\*IST 6 (N6), a software package designed to facilitate the management and analysis for qualitative data (Richards, 2002). Like other qualitative researchers using CAQDAS, I have at times drawn on a range of methodological inspiration (Lee and Fielding, 1996: 4). For example, although I consider the use of metaphor by both researcher and participants a vital aspect of any research process (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), the heart of the analytic procedures I used involved constant comparison between units of data - in this inquiry extracts of children's speech or writing. These I categorized according to both *a priori* categories

based on existing theory or literature (such as those referred to in chapters 2 and 3), inductively derived concepts (or 'referential categories', see Richards and Richards, 1995: 85) and what are commonly known as '*in vivo*' categories based on participant's own words (Richards, 2002: 56):

the aim of grounded theory is to seek similarities and diversities, collecting a range of indicators that point to the multiple qualitative facets of a potentially significant concept. (Richardson, 1996: 93)

This process is sometimes called "coding" though in CAQDAS terminology, the more important conceptual task is known as "coding-on" – a process of abstracting further from initial ideas about data and a form of simplification towards the parsimony and scope of formulation that Glaser and Strauss (1967: 111) see as a hallmark of grounded theory.

#### Codes and clusters

This is not a mere counting exercise, but a comparative one in order to illuminate phenomena by contrast in which codes both denote passages of text for retrieval and denote facts in the text (Seidel and Kelle, 1995). Crucially, however, I consider codes as heuristic devices for the discovery of meaning and that can serve to enable analysts to open up new perspectives and insights in their handling of related and contrasting data. Codes however (sometimes identified with 'categories' – see Miles and Huberman 1994: 56), like any label, can become reified producing a consequent loss of phenomena and their rightful context and this is a particular danger in using CAQDAS. My solution was generally to return to the context of the data (mainly children's talk) organized into "nodes" and to listen to the original tapes regularly whilst working on data analysis; in addition, I looked for recurrent "clusters" of codes or categories that appeared regularly in the data in order to 'set the stage for drawing

conclusions' (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 57) – sometimes using the Boolean search facilities in N6 and the coding stripes facility that shows visually how patterns of selected codes have been applied to data (Richards, 2002).

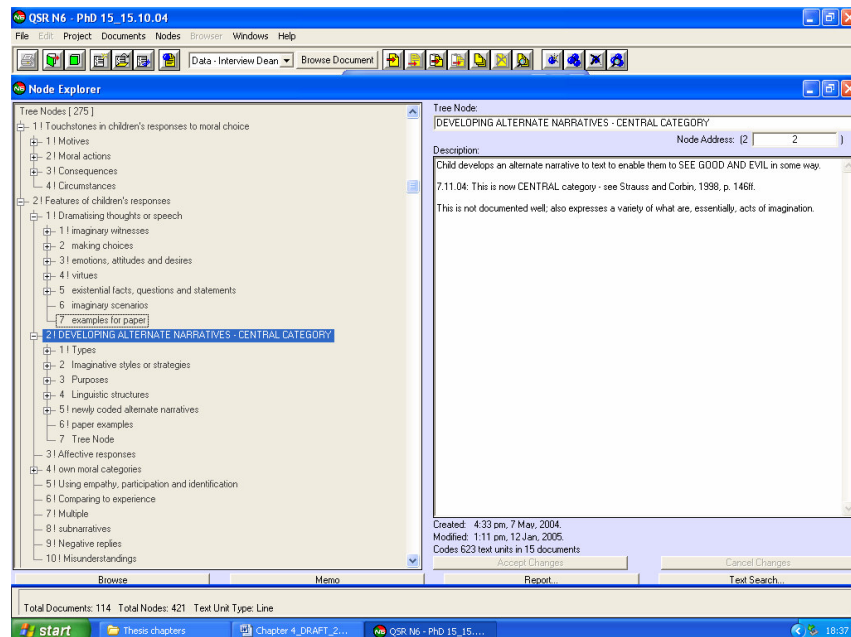
#### The use of NUD\*IST 6

N6 itself allows the user to create a conceptual structure in which data can be held for comparison known as a tree structure comprising numerous “nodes”, each of which act as containers for ideas and ways of abstracting from data (Richards, 2002: 35). These can be combined, deleted or repositioned as a growing sense of the data develops. An intensive analysis of a limited number of transcripts resulted in the initial tree structure that I refined as core concepts became clearer through collecting and analyzing more data. The data management possibilities of N6 are certainly no replacement for the analytic thinking of the researcher and at times I was concerned about the possibility that data managed in this way becomes easily fragmented and reified, despite the fact that numerous paths can be created through qualitative data in this way (Dey, 1995). To counteract this, I kept my research journal going, kept a range of research memos about emerging and recurrent ideas (Strauss, 1987) and returned to listen to the tapes of children's talk; I also used the context facility in N6 regularly to return isolated extracts of text to their context to examine them in their proximity to other statements children had made in order to clarify what I thought they could suggest.

#### The heart of the analysis

A copy of the “final” conceptual structure of the project is given below in figure 1. I call it the “final” version though it is in fact the 15<sup>th</sup> version – the version at which I stopped because I felt that I had got to the ‘heart’ of the analysis I was interested in (Wolcott, 1994: 183). By this “final” version, many concepts had fallen away leaving

two central concerns that are sub-categorized according to the observable processes in the data that seemed most significantly related to my research question about fiction and the child's moral imagination – touchstones in the children's responses to characters' moral choices in the texts and key features in their responses like the child's dramatization of imagined and alternative narratives. This is recorded in upper case letters as I consider this and its relationship to dramatization the central category of the research (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Appendix 9 also shows the initial tree structure I created in N6 and the seventh version in which some of the core concepts like touchstones had emerged as significant in the data.



**Figure 4.1: “Final” tree structure organized around two hierarchies and showing core categories**

## Limitations

With hindsight it is easy to see how I could have done things differently. In particular, I would like to have collected more written material and more drawing by the children consistent with the approach of Coles (e. g. 1986a, 1990); the data I collected is

mainly spoken. I also restricted the data collection to individual responses, pair and group responses but not whole class situations as such. There is room for further data collection here. My choice of N6 was very much a practical one; I decided not to switch my work to NVIVO because of the time it would have taken me to relearn the software skills; I can see the advantages in using NVIVO for this kind of project in the future, especially in terms of fine-grained, detailed analysis and comparison of cases (Gibbs, 2002).

#### **4.11 Summary and conclusions**

##### Strategic design

In this chapter I have discussed issues central to the conduct of case study and teacher research and how they contribute to my overall methodology. These include the use of case study as a research strategy especially suited for inquiry about how and why questions, and that is particularistic and heuristic (Yin, 2003). I have also outlined my own realist ontological and epistemological assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge and reality and considered these in relation to the methods I chose to use in both data collection and analysis. I then considered the child as a case and ways in which I tried to give credibility to the research. These included a multi-case design, an audit trail, collection of different data types across a lengthy time period and sustained simultaneous data analysis. I also considered the notions of researcher transparency, fuzzy generalizations and naturalistic assertions in building convincing accounts and explanations of cases (Stake, 1995, Bassey, 1999, Bassey and Pratt, 2003).

## Moral enterprise

By focusing on the craft of research I have highlighted important issues connected with my sample of cases and foreground the idea of theoretical sampling as a strategy to ground emerging research observations and categories in empirical data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I also discussed a range of ethical issues that emerged during the course of the research such as informed consent and confidentiality before outlining my methods of data analysis using NUD\*IST6. In providing such a rationale, I have at all times considered the education and research processes involved to be a fundamentally moral enterprise and have tried to act accordingly (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). I believe this is especially important in a project closely concerned with the moral and imaginative lives of children and for this reason have also referred to some of the special issues that arise when working with children in this chapter. In the chapters that follow, I present an account of the main findings of the study.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Developing readers: Case contexts and descriptions**

‘...various interpretations are...not haphazard or subjective, but follow as answers to different questions...’

Kvale (1996: 216)

#### **5.1 Introduction**

A brief outline

In this chapter I introduce the contexts in which the study for this thesis was carried out, including the school and its classrooms, the texts and the children who read and responded to them. I give a brief outline of some of the main features of the school as well as brief synopses of the texts I used in the classroom with the classes from which the individual cases of children were drawn. I also discuss the contextual influence of my own classroom pedagogy on the collection of data and the outcomes of the research. For each child, I provide a glimpse into his or her individual approach to the texts and to reading response and summarise the main features of the ways in which they responded to the moral dimensions of the stories. By doing this, I prepare the ground for a fuller presentation of the main findings drawn from cross-case analysis and comparison of strategies and themes in their moral response.

#### **5.2 The school context**

A Catholic High School

The school where I teach and where I collected the data is a small 11 – 18 mixed Catholic comprehensive in the United Kingdom. Situated in an inner-city, it accommodates a little over 600 pupils including approximately 80 pupils in years 12 and 13. As it is a Catholic school, it is located on pleasant grounds next to its parish church where pupils attend regular assemblies and Masses for feast days and special

occasions. The school was awarded specialist Science College status in 2003 and the pupils' standards on entry are in line with national averages, with those in year 9 and beyond at the start of the study below average when they entered the school in year 7. Most pupils at the school are from a white British background, though about 15% are from other ethnic origins including a dozen or more refugee children, mainly from Eastern Europe. At 16%, the entitlement to free school meals is above average and the school has a higher than average number of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need, mainly for moderate learning difficulties. The school has a strong Christian framework that is highly supportive of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

#### The English department

The English Department is housed in three suited mobile classrooms connected together to form one teaching block. My own teaching room is one of these classrooms situated somewhat aside from the main teaching blocks of the school on the edge of the playing fields. It was here that I taught the children who are the main cases of interest, as well as their classes. I held small group sessions at lunchtimes for children to discuss the stories we were reading in class. It is an adequate, but not well equipped environment that soars into Saharan temperatures during the summer months and plummets into arctic frost in winter. My classes sit in rows, or at times on tables grouped for small group work and occasionally have to compete with lawn mowing or classes filing past from PE lessons on the way to the tennis courts. It is the kind of room that is small enough to create intimacy with a class but as a structure is a little shabby and neglected due to its age. However, a new English and Performing Arts block is currently under construction.

The St Mary Centre

In addition to this teaching block, I used the school referral unit (called the St Mary Centre) to conduct one-to-one interview conversations with children. This unit was added to the school about five years ago and consisted, at the time of the data collection period of two rooms, the smaller of which I used for interviews. Both rooms were monitored by CCTV on a 24-hour basis and I chose the smaller room as it provided a convenient, quiet location after school with a round table, chairs and little access for others except cleaning staff and those working in the centre.

### 5.3 Texts and classroom contexts

Summary of data

During the sixteen month data collection period I was teaching a full timetable that included years 7 – 9. I began data collection with pupils from two classes in March 2003, starting with the responses of three children from years 7 and 8 to some of their own choices of story and the Grimm fairy tale *The Seven Ravens*. Table 2 below gives a summary of the texts and which children responded to them, either in interview conversations, small group work or writing.

**Table 5.2: Main cases of children and responses to texts**

	Gareth	Holly	Rachel	Darren	Anna	James
<i>Own Stories</i>	✓	✓	✓			
<i>The Flowers</i>	✓					
<i>The Seven Ravens</i>	✓	✓	✓			
<i>The Voyage of the Dawn Treader</i>			✓	✓		
<i>The Pearl</i>	✓	✓				
<i>Moonfleet</i>					✓	✓

### A range of fiction

The texts I chose represented a mixture of availability in the Department stock cupboard and specially ordered texts like *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C. S. Lewis. To a degree, these reflect the kinds of stories older children and adolescents tend to prefer such as those in the adventure-romance genre or *Bildungsroman* that deal with the problems of growing up (Appleyard, 1991). I taught each text to whole classes from which the children who represent the main cases of the study were drawn along with other children who supported them in various tasks. Because of this, class discussion about the texts was part of the day-to-day interaction I had with the children about the stories and sometimes this informs their responses. When it appears to do so, I draw attention to it in the analysis below. The stories themselves represent a range of narratives, from fantasy and fairy tale to adventure story, though for the longer texts the children's responses are limited to parts of the narrative about which they were involved at that point in time, not necessarily the complete text. With the shorter stories, their responses are about the complete text.

### The quest motif

Each of the longer narratives described below, although from different genres, contains strong central characters and episodes of clear moral conflict; all three could in some sense also be seen as quest stories though of quite different types. One is a quest for treasure and freedom, one for long-lost friends and one for wealth and riches. Of the shorter narratives, one could also be seen as a kind of quest story. These factors, including the practicality of what was available were definite reasons influencing their choice. The quest story, as I suggested in chapter 3 often has particular parallels to each person's own quest for identity and moral purpose (MacIntyre, 1981, Meilaender, 1984).

## 5.4 Pupils' own choice of stories

### Popular texts

These included *Cliffhanger* by Jacqueline Wilson, *The Six Swan Brothers* by Adèle Geras, a fairy tale similar to the Hans Andersen tale of *The Wild Swans*, as well as Roald Dahl's *The Vicar of Nibbleswicke*, an amusing story of a vicar who cannot speak without jumbling up his letters, leading to some entertaining results. Both Holly and Gareth discussed the *Harry Potter* fantasy series, including *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* as well as *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*.

## 5.5 Shorter narratives

### Classic and contemporary

The Brothers Grimm story *The Seven Ravens* was the subject of responses by three of the main cases of children, supported by other children. It is a type of quest story about a young girl who goes in search of her brothers who have been turned into seven ravens by an enchantment. Its themes include self-sacrificial love and obedience and the journey motif is central to its development. Alice Walker's *The Flowers* is a short story of about 600 words set in the Southern states of America and describes how a young girl named Myop stumbles across the skeletal remains of what was probably a black slave who had been hung in the woods around her farm. It is a haunting story of innocence and experience that requires a considerable amount of inference to unravel its plot.

## 5.6 Longer narratives

### Adventures in Narnia

C. S. Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is a text I was reading with a year 7 class when Rachel and Darren from this class took part in responding to the story. Fifth in

Lewis' well-known Chronicles of Narnia series, the story follows the adventures of Lucy, Edmund and Eustace as they journey aboard the Narnian ship *The Dawn Treader* in search of seven long-lost Narnian lords amongst the islands of the Great Eastern Ocean of Narnia. Viewed by Lewis himself as a kind of spiritual quest (Hooper, 1996: 426), their adventures bring them into contact with giant sea serpents, retired stars and islands of terrifying darkness. The children's discussions and some written work focus on chapters 1 – 7 as this is as far as we had read in class at the time of data collection. Both Rachel and Darren focus their discussions upon early episodes in the story. These are concerned with the recovery of the Lone Islands into Narnian hands and the transformation of the bad-tempered and selfish Eustace into a dragon, followed by his eventual regeneration by the King of Narnia, Aslan the lion.

#### A modern parable

*The Pearl* by John Steinbeck is a novel I studied with a year 9 class at the start of the year. A kind of parable on the peril of riches, it follows the adventures of Kino a poor Mexican pearl fisherman, his wife Juana and their baby son Coyotito. While fishing one day, Kino finds a large pearl in the ocean and the story concerns how he tries to sell the pearl to improve his lot in life, only to find himself betrayed by the greed of most of those around him who try to steal the pearl from him. The pearl brings him one misfortune after another, ending in the death of his only son; Gareth and Holly responded with other children to the whole story.

#### A nineteenth century romance

The third longer narrative I used with a year 7 class was *Moonfleet* by J. Meade Falkner, a nineteenth century adventure story about smugglers set in the English West County, and northern Europe. It is a highly atmospheric *Bildungsroman* with strong characters

and themes such as friendship, courage and self-sacrificial love. Children enjoy its “otherness”, its unusual vocabulary, drama and changing settings as well as the moving tragedy of the central characters John Trenchard and Elzevir Block. Anna and James responded to the first ten chapters, again because of the timing of data collection. *Flat Stanley* by Jeff Brown is a story about a boy who becomes so flat that he can do unusual things like be posted through a letterbox; this story was the subject of Natalie’s responses which I chose not to refer to due to their own brevity.

## 5.7 Classroom pedagogy

The importance of literature

Every classroom is both unique to itself and similar to other classrooms. My own is no exception and throughout the data collection period I taught English to the children who form the basis of this study. My own approach to teaching English is grounded in the development of the Revised National Curriculum Orders for English (e. g. DfEE, 1999: 44-54) which came into use some years after I trained to be an English teacher. It has also been subject to the influence of colleagues and the National Literacy Strategy at Key Stage 3 (DfEE, 2001). As such, I use a wide range of strategies in the classroom but have continued to maintain a firm belief in the importance of literature to the English curriculum. This is partly because in the curriculum, English lessons are almost the only point of contact for pupils with literature of the past and present. I continue to believe in the importance of literature to young people, and in the importance of reading development:

Literature study...[aims] to educate children to read an ever-widening range of texts...to help readers discover what texts are trying to reveal...to give young people access to what different generations and cultures are trying to tell each other about their lives...and thus to enlarge the scope of their lives. (Davies, 1996: 141)

However, my particular interest in the moral imagination is a focus that often (though not always) informs my own teaching style, choice of texts, choice of activities and approach to the subject of literature.

#### Teacherly guidance

Because of this, I try to present pupils in the classroom with opportunities for focused moral reflection and dialogue and occasions to talk about and ‘examine what informs the moral compass guiding fictional lives’ (Bohlin 2005: 31). This is especially the case in my own teaching of fiction and drama. Whilst developing this study, I noted several times in my research journal how my own teaching, my own guidance of the children and the study itself were intertwined in ways that cannot easily be separated. For example:

Use of pair/group individual tasks in class – adapt, rework schemes of work to accommodate...changes in teaching methods following from the research...moral questions raised more specifically in the teaching  
(Research Journal, 12.4.03).

and similarly with reference to teaching *Moonfleet* with year 7,

The children were spellbound, even those who had read ahead and knew what would happen. Our discussions in class were very much about why John intervenes and whether Elzevir was doing the right thing or not  
(Research Journal, 2.6.04).

In both these examples, I reflect on my own “teacherly influence”, how in fact I adapted my teaching whilst developing the project making changes in my approach as well as focusing specifically on the moral dimension of story in the classroom. My own voice can be ‘heard’ in the dialogues I collected with the children, at times subtly shaping the direction of the conversation - though not leading the responses - merely probing for further information or clarification. The questions I devised for the semi-



structured interviews reflect classroom concerns to some extent, as do the topics of the children's pair and group conversations.

#### Mediated action

It is important to remember however, that despite my own mediating role in exploring the moral dimension of story in the classroom in the project, I would suggest that choice of response and active agency remained with the children. This is because children develop through both independent and collaborative problem solving (Vygotsky, 1978: 86). The child in this process is both an active agent, though not within settings entirely of their own choosing, but within which learning is based upon mediated action (Daniels, 2001: 13):

human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them. (Vygotsky, 1978: 88)

#### Children's creativity

My own influence upon the data collected therefore remains substantial if only because teaching and learning are inextricably linked. I expect my classes to read both texts I choose for them, as well as their own choices of texts; sometimes these are negotiated. In a project of this kind, the voices of the children sometimes reflect classroom discussion with me and sometimes contain examples of ways of thinking that I have introduced – like the idea of “treating others” certain ways. Nevertheless, their own thoughts and reflections about these matters remain and their dialogues are rich in examples of their own ideas and ways of thinking that were not demanded by their teacher nor their friends yet that emerge as a testimony to their own resourcefulness and creativity.

## 5.8 Case vignettes

### Distinctive approaches

In the following vignettes or glimpses, I give examples of the children's responses to the texts with the main features that distinguish their approach to the moral dimension of the narratives. I also highlight individual features of their uses of imagination in this process, and where relevant suggest theoretical implications. In chapters 6 – 10 I elaborate further on the relationship between their responses and the theoretical ideas I outlined earlier in the thesis. All extracts from the interview material and other data are presented in a different font (arial), indicated by date and transcript line number and include minimal regularisation of punctuation to help the reader. Square brackets [ ] indicate a note about the text including “guesses” or suggestions about children's use of words where this is not clear. Italics show where children appear to go into role-play or dramatise the voices of characters. Underlining is used for overlapping speech between participants (see Burgess, 1984, Swann, 1994). I abbreviate myself, the research interviewer as “Res.” in the transcripts.

## 5.9 Developing readers: Gareth

‘English is OK’

Gareth lives with his mother and father and two brothers (one younger, one older) in a street I drive along each day on my way to school. Sometimes I see him at either end of the day heading home or leaving for school. His house is a small red-brick terrace with little or no garden, part of a row of houses part rented, part let and part owned in the centre of the city. Gareth was baptised in the Church of England, but chose not to be confirmed and his family no longer attend church regularly. At school, he is a polite and friendly boy whom I taught in year 8 and 9, keen on

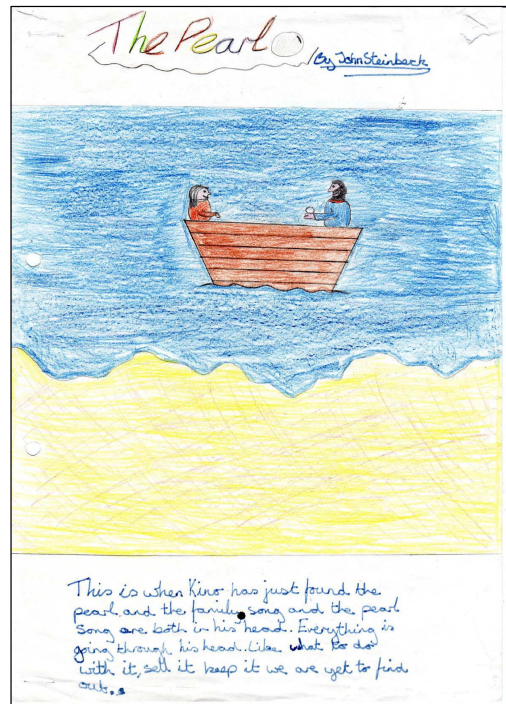
football, playing both for the school and a local team. A Manchester United supporter, he hopes at some point to see them play live.

In top sets for Science and Maths, Gareth is somewhat surprisingly only in a middle set for English. His favourite subject is Physical Education (P.E.), his least favourite Maths. English he rates as 'OK' perhaps because confidence in literacy has been a problem for Gareth since Primary school. However, he is interested in fantasy, especially Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* series upon which he is an expert, as well as Indie or alternative rock and the 1990s band *Oasis*. His main weaknesses in English are lack of confidence and a slow work rate, both having held him back. At the end of year 9, he scored level 6 on his English SAT Test, confirming my view of him as a pupil who should have been more highly placed than he was. After leaving school at 16, Gareth went on to work for a local plastics firm owned by his uncle.

#### Characters taking sides

Gareth responded to *The Seven Ravens* and *The Pearl* at some length, as well as to *The Flowers* and some of the *Harry Potter* series. He is therefore well represented in the data. He came to the school lacking confidence in reading but made excellent progress reaching level 6 in the National Curriculum by the time he ended year 9 (past the end of the data collection period). His responses were wide-ranging and imaginative, showing that he was interested in characters and their contexts and in their motives. He was also willing and able to take on characters' roles and to consider questions and material beyond the text where he considered it relevant to questions of moral conduct or the treatment of others. An example from his written work is shown in figure 1 below.

Figure 5.1: Gareth's picture and text about Kino from *The Pearl*



For example, in discussing the *Harry Potter* series he was several times interested in the concept of moral ‘sides’,

- Gareth ...and the night before the Quidditch final...he [Harry] was woken and looked out the window he went to get some water and he saw what looked like a black dog walking across the pitch...and he was like *that's the Grim* and then he sees Hermione's cat next to it like and I was think[ing] *is this cat on the Grim's side...?*
- Res. You seem quite interested in the ideas of sides
- Gareth Yeah
- Res. Is that part of the story?
- Gareth I think so yeah

(interview 25.3.03: 557 - 567).

Reflecting on his own experience, he reviews the characters here trying to mentally “place” them onto one of two ‘sides’ that he later refers to as the “good” and “bad” side in the story.

## Explaining bad behaviour

Often interested in characters' choices, their motives and whether they are to blame for events, Gareth considered several "explanations" for characters' behaviour in interview, as well as comparing their behaviour to his own or to that drawn from his *life-world*. He considered, for example how far a child's upbringing could influence his or her moral choices in relation to another character in the *Harry Potter* series, Draco Malfoy, suggesting that families can "make" or form character, in this case for evil:

Gareth	It's made him [Draco Malfoy] like that as well
Res.	Do you think people families can do that then...?
Gareth	It's like...from when you're little...say if you see your parents or someone do something really horrible you're going to think <i>oh I'd best do that because it's right</i> because you don't know what's right and wrong when you're little... (interview 25.3.03: 183 - 189).

The influence of the environment or the surroundings that supply the context for moral actions interested Gareth in other ways, providing him with opportunities to supply material missing from the original texts, transforming them and expanding the narratives to support his explanations or evaluations of character or action.

## Role-playing characters

Sometimes this also involved him in participating in the text, role-playing the voice of the characters. Here he imagines himself in the role of Kino, the main character in John Steinbeck's story *The Pearl*. In despair about how his fortunes have changed for the worse since finding the pearl, Gareth takes the voice of Kino cataloguing the woes that he and his family have had to endure:

I think it was actually the point where the trackers...he thought maybe he thought back and thought *there is nothing good come out of this so far...my house is burnt down...someone's broke the canoe so I can't like go in my canoe to the capital...the doctor is being really mean but then he found out I had a pearl and he treated Coyotito* so that could be one good thing about the pearl that he saved Coyotito's life for then he's still alive at the end anyway  
(interview 10.11.03: 143 - 152).

A neat way to summarise the effects of finding the pearl on the main character, the voice gives immediacy to Gareth's account, recreating the drama and bringing it into the present. The use of the present tense helps this though he is careful to locate the voice at a place in the narrative – later in the story when he is being tracked down by greedy hunters in search of his pearl. A successful piece of re-narration, it shows Gareth's imaginative sense of the drama of the text but is also an invented account, absent from the text.

#### Moral voices

For Gareth, the moral dimension of stories offers many opportunities for him to approach the narrative in order to make connections with his own life, to identify with characters' moral struggles and to reflect on the meaning of virtues like obedience and courage along with their counterparts such as disobedience and cowardice. In this final example, he considers the hypocrisy of the character of the doctor in *The Pearl* who will only treat people who are rich enough to pay him well,

...he only treated people for a price and Kino could only offer the doctor like these really misshaped pearls when he went to see him and he just refused him but then he found...the pearl of the world and then all things changed and he [the doctor] was like *I'll go and treat them 'cause they've got a pearl*  
(interview 10.11.03 : 230 - 234).

Imagining the doctor's thoughts or voice again allows him to place the doctor's moral attitude in a meaningful context, concretising his greedy motives in a way that is memorable and accessible.

## 5.10 Developing readers: Holly

### Coping with ASD

Unlike Gareth, Holly lives in a village outside of the city. On occasion I have dropped her off on my own way home after school as I pass her village *en route* to where I live. Holly lives with her mother, father and four-year old brother. Her family are not religious and do not attend a church of any kind. Holly herself is usually a quiet girl with a very naïve and innocent demeanour. As she suffers from a mild form of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), she can appear strange to other children and to adults; she is highly emotional and finds social interaction with other children difficult. However, she is very gentle and kind unless she is threatened by a situation or person that she doesn't understand when she can react badly, shouting and storming away from the situation. This doesn't stop her enjoying English lessons, although Art and Maths are her favourite lessons – Holly loves to draw. She doesn't enjoy Science, Geography or History as she finds them more difficult. With careful routines however, she manages well and works hard at her school work.

Holly has a long history of coping with ASD and has got used to being different in some ways. Through Primary school she was constantly assessed and her mother has worked hard with the school to ensure Holly's Statement of Special Educational Needs is fully implemented. She is a keen reader like Gareth of the *Harry Potter* stories and the *Animal Ark* series, as well as fairy tales. She belonged to the Brownies before she attended Secondary School and is afraid of snakes and spiders. After leaving the school in year 11, she went to board at a Special School for 16 – 19 year-olds for two nights a week where learns at the same time with others like herself. I have met her since she left the school and she is very happy helping and working with others with similar disabilities.

## Gaps in understanding

Holly, like Gareth read and responded to *The Seven Ravens* as well as *The Pearl* and her own choices of stories including the *Harry Potter* series. However, partly because of her ASD, she sometimes finds developing responses difficult, or at times appears to consider certain kinds of questions irrelevant or of little interest.

**Figure 5.2: Holly's storyboard of *Jorinda and Joringel* by the Brothers Grimm**



There are therefore apparent gaps in her understanding of the stories at some points in the data. She has, however, a strong sense of morality but at the same time can find it difficult to apply this appropriately to others by taking into account circumstances and motives. Her written work is exacting and carefully presented; an example is given in figure 2 above.

## Feel the love

Several important themes emerged fairly early in Holly's responses. She was particularly interested in the relationship between certain characters' actions and what she called the 'heart' that she broadly identifies with love and conscience acting as a "voice" that guides a person. Responding to *The Seven Ravens*, she comments in some



detail about this concept and returns to it in other circumstances, for instance in responding to Steinbeck's *The Pearl*. Interested in the way in which the girl in the Grimm's story takes off on an 'adventure' on her own, and leaving her parents behind, she identifies the girl's strength with her 'heart' and the love she has for her brothers – material not specified in the text, but partly inferred and imagined as taking place within the protagonist:

- Holly I was thinking about...the way she was brave I wonder if she grew real strong [?] to go out on an adventure on her own for several days  
Res. ...why did you wonder if she'd become strong?  
Holly Well if she wasn't strong how...how could she go out and do things on her own?  
Res. Do you think she might have become strong by doing that or do you think she was strong in the first place...?  
Holly Well her heart might have made her strong she might have kind of listened with her heart and gone off and done it  
Res. What do you mean by her heart?  
Holly Well people's hearts are the most powerful thing of all time...and when she heard she had brothers she might have loved them and so she might have followed the love of her brothers yes and gone off to find them...the heart's powerful because it can make you feel the love...as long as you can have as much love as you can get you feel stronger too...She had all the love she could get [?] about her brothers and maybe her heart would [?] growing stronger too...

(interview, 31.3.03: 117 - 140).

The notion of the 'heart' as the source of power and love accords well with the virtue ethic discussed in chapter 3; for Holly it is clearly linked to the emotional life and being able to 'feel the love' even though here she has created an imaginary 'you' who might experience this. She makes a strong case here that the girl's motivation for rescuing her brothers is located in her (the girl's) feelings for them, and that the motive force of the emotional life in general can provide the strength to act virtuously and 'become strong'.

### The heart and virtue

This is quite consistent with the suggestion that the passions have an important function in the moral life in moving the “heart” of the individual to act. Here, this example of what could be called the “affective conscience” appears to be an important component in Holly’s imaginary reconstruction of the story. Indeed, these reflections go right to the old question first asked by Aristotle about the source of virtue (which means “strength” or “power”) and to whether what we mean by virtue is the act or the disposition. For Holly, it would seem to be located in the ‘heart’ which includes love, conscience *and* emotion guiding the person’s actions.

### The voice of God

This theme she takes up again in discussing characters in *The Pearl*, linking it clearly to the virtue of courage. This time, however, she links listening with the heart to listening to ‘the voice of God’ and her own religious faith,

Holly The most interesting thing about the characters for me is the courage they have when they're following their hearts...Kino and his family they're very very brave

Res. ...what do you mean by following their heart?

Holly Not just following their heart, following God the voice of God...I think they all believe in God...the same as I do

Res. So in what way do you think Kino and his family are trying to follow God...in the story?

Holly You may not be able to hear God with your ears but you can still hear him with your heart...and if your heart and if the voice of God is talking to you in your heart you have to obey it...'cause I'm sure that the only thing he wants to do is to try to save you

(interview 1.12.03: 308 - 324).

Several themes converge here. The family’s courage in ‘following their hearts’ and ‘the voice of God’ as well as obedience to conscience, suggested by the image of God ‘talking to you’ summoning once again an imaginary “other” who needs salvation.

## Conscience and belief

Like Kino and his family, it can take bravery to follow one's conscience and after the finding of the pearl it is certainly true that they are in danger, the corollary upon which "being saved" in the physical and spiritual sense depends. Holly's explanation is based on her own beliefs ('the same as I do') and links the narrative to her own understanding of faith using an imagined third person ('you') to connect them thus giving the original narrative a sense of meaning within her own frames of reference. In the original text, it is Kino's wife who is most obviously identified with the Catholicism of the story's region along with his brother Juan Tomás; but it is Kino who wishes for a church wedding and who talks of going with God on his journey to sell the pearl. There is no doubt, however, that religious sentiment permeates Steinbeck's novel and that Holly, in her own way makes this meaningful using both her imagination and her reason.

## 5.11 Developing readers: Darren

### Active role-play

Darren is a popular boy who enjoys English, especially if he gets the opportunity to talk about his work. He lives in the city with his father, two step-brothers and step-sister. He is the oldest of the children. His mother is Roman Catholic and Darren was baptised and confirmed in the Catholic Church as a consequence. She lives near the city in a local village. Darren is a keen football player for the school and a local team but also enjoys the basketball team and archery. He is an active member of the Marine Force Cadets and enjoys talking about his experiences of this – he wants to be a Marine when he is older and has completed some Further Post-16 Education. His favourite books are Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and anything by Roald Dahl. He likes to play games on his personal computer, especially those involving first person

role-playing like *Fable*. His favourite music is rock music and he listens to bands like the UK's *Bullet for my Valentine* and Californian band *Linkin Park*. His favourite subjects are P.E., English and History although he doesn't enjoy Maths even though it is the subject he is best at. Darren is in middle sets for all subjects.

At another angle: Touchstones of virtue

The main responses Darren made were to C. S Lewis' fantasy story *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. He spoke about this story with me at some length and with several other children in the activities he undertook. A variety of incidents from this story (and others in the study) act as what I call moral touchstones to their imaginations, allowing them to consider the moral life from 'another angle' as Darren put it when discussing this story with me. Such touchstones offer the child many opportunities to consider aspects of the moral life in imaginative ways and to connect them to examples of virtue and to the 'inner connections of character, action and narrative' so important for the development of the moral imagination (Guroian, 1998: 25). I consider the concept of moral touchstones further in chapter 6 below.

Conceptions of courage

Darren often discussed the virtues of courage and justice as well as the virtues of prudence and temperance and in this example, he explores the same distinction Holly was interested in between being and doing. Here his focus is on chapters four and five - the bravery of Lord Bern, Reepicheep the mouse and the ship's crew in attacking Gumpas the Governor of the Lone Islands and in sailing through the storm afterwards:

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| Darren | ...I'd say Lord Bern's pretty brave as well leading that army to...Gumpas and I think...the sailors are pretty brave as well from what they do to the ship like they'd go out and risk their lives one of them actually did die he went overboard... |
| Simon  | So...what do you think?  |

Darren Oh...who do you think is the bravest out of the whole lot of them like...Lord Bern Caspian...?  
 Simon I think Reepicheep's quite brave 'cause he's one of like the strongest  
 Darren He isn't actually strong but...  
 Simon He is  
 Darren Like...he guarded the water at night and any man could have pulled a sword on him and just chopped him into pieces  
 Simon Yeah but they just think he's probably a rat or a mouse...  
 Darren But he's really brave and that he wants to go where no man's ever gone before he wants to go to the horizon [to] see the lion...  
 (pair discussion 25.6.03: 10 - 26).

These successive details and incidents combine four different episodes, all of which act as narrative touchstones for reflection at other points during the children's discussions and interview conversations. Here the boys build a conception of courage in terms of adventure, risk, self-sacrifice and strength connecting several aspects of the narrative together in order to develop their moral deliberations into one that is both imaginative and searching.

#### Stolen water and moral causality

Darren was also - like other children I talked to - especially interested in the ways in which actions or decisions result from certain motives. He was also often interested in how actions have certain consequences in the story. This interest in what is a kind of moral causality is evident in this interview conversation about Eustace's efforts to gain extra water rations for himself during a drought on board *The Dawn Treader*.

Res. What do you think Eustace valued most before Dragon Island?  
 Darren Greed and stuff like that he just wanted everything for himself like the water he didn't care about anyone else he just wanted to get water...he was hot and thirsty so he went and got some water but if he had took that water that'd've made someone else hot and thirsty...they'd all start fighting and the discipline would just go...  
 (interview 1.7.03: 239 - 245).

Later in the same interview conversation, Darren is keen to emphasize Eustace's reasons for trying to steal an extra water ration, stating that his actions were done 'for the wrong reasons' and that he could have waited:

Darren I think characters sometimes do stuff for the wrong reasons  
 Res. Can you think of an example where that happens?  
 Darren Eustace...he did...he stole water for the wrong reasons just because he was thirsty he could have waited for tomorrow and had his water rations  
 Res. He wasn't actually dying was he?  
 Darren No he wasn't actually like if he was really megathirsty and dying of water I think Reepicheep would've let him have the water but...he just thought *I want a drink it's a midnight drink for me stuff the other lot...*but he could have just saved his water rations that day took a little bit out of it then saved it for tomorrow and had a big drink...so it'd've helped him a lot...

(interview 1.7.03: 318 - 329).

In both instances, Darren is interested in the moral dimension of this episode and it allows him to explore one character's possible reasons for acting the way he did, as well as to consider the consequences – it would have 'made someone else hot and thirsty...they'd all start fighting and the discipline would just go'.

#### Imagining the inner life

The episode also allows him to suggest an alternative action – 'saved it for tomorrow' – and to put himself into Eustace's place by dramatizing the selfish nature of his thoughts, voicing them out loud. By imaginatively connecting the motives, actions and consequences of Eustace's selfishness, and by entering into it dramatically, Darren shows considerable understanding of the text. He also demonstrates his understanding of the nature of greed and of the relationship between moral motive, action and consequence. He is clearly able to imagine the character of Eustace's inner life, and so for a moment to understand a moral experience, albeit in a vicarious way.

### 5.12 Developing readers: Rachel

#### Unusual phobias

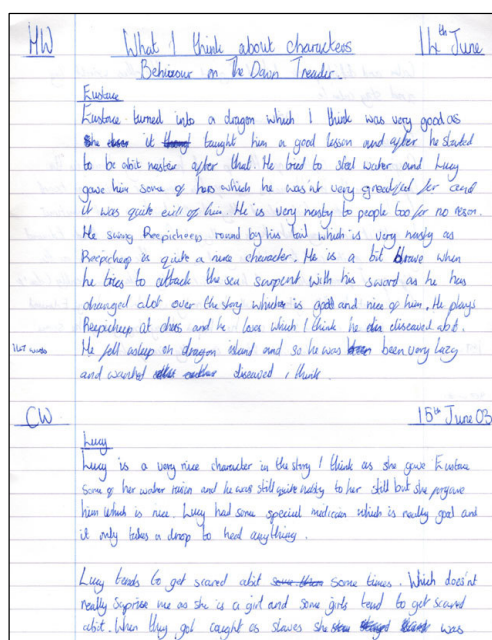
Rachel lives quite near to Gareth in an end-of-terrace house along a similar street that runs parallel to his. She has one younger brother who is now also at the school and

lives with him and her mother. Her parents are divorced and her father moved to Australia some years ago. She attends a local Church of England parish church and whilst taking part in the project was being confirmed. Rachel likes Geography and History but dislikes English and Maths. She is in the middle sets for all subjects, though was eventually moved up a set in English in year 10. She likes to read what she calls 'realistic' stories like those of Jacqueline Wilson, but also enjoys Roald Dahl's stories; she was surprised to find that she enjoyed reading Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. She sings in the school choir, goes to Cubs outside of school and is learning to play the violin and the viola and describes her self as a 'bit of a geek' (ie she likes schoolwork in general!). She likes pop music, especially the music of the American singer-songwriters *Pink* and *Christina Aguilera*. Unusually, she has phobias about chewing gum and peacocks. After leaving school at 16, she attends a local College of Further Education where she is taking a Diploma in Childcare and Education.

#### Seven nasty brothers

In year 7 at the start of the data collection, Rachel responded to *The Seven Ravens*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and some of her own stories including Roald Dahl's *The Vicar of Nibbleswick*, *Cliffhanger* by Jacqueline Wilson and *The Six Swan Brothers* by Adèle Geras. She kept a reading journal periodically between 25.3.03 and 29.6.03 which refers to most of these stories, with several more extended entries for Lewis' *Dawn Treader*. An extract from her writing is shown in figure 5.3 below.

Figure 5.3: Rachel's writing about characters in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*



Responding to *The Seven Ravens* Rachel, like the other children, showed considerable interest in the relationship of the parents to the children in the story, especially in terms of obedience and disobedience. She considered that the parents were 'nasty' to the boys who were turned into ravens, and that the boys themselves 'could have been a bit nicer' towards the parents. She found the ravens themselves 'chilling' and made strongly affective responses to most of the stories she had read, extensively connecting them to her own life experiences such as her own relationship with her brother, parents and grandfather. In this response, she discusses the raven brothers:

- Res. Do you think it was a good choice of bird the writer made to choose the raven...to have them turned into a raven rather than sparrows for example?
- Rachel I suppose it is in a way because they didn't really obey their father and so in a way it makes them sound like quite evil people... they're not nice and I think they're a bit jealous...[of] their sister...getting like maybe more attention and that to them 'cause that's what it sounds like...they had seven boys and it might be nice to have a change kind of thing...I don't think I could live with seven boys...  
(interview 1.4.03: 182 - 191).



Interested in the consequences of disobedience she also projects herself into the narrative situation by considering that she couldn't live with 'seven boys' like the girl in the story.

#### Running away and the morality of childhood

She was also interested in the girl's actions finding her own particular focus of interest in the way in which the girl goes out alone to try to rescue her brothers. For Rachel, this was done in 'secrecy', a category she applied several times to the girl's actions as if she considered them stealthy in some way. All the children discussed this and in the dialogue that follows, Rachel, Gareth and Holly try to decide on the morality of her actions in leaving home. The original text describes what she takes with her:

She took nothing with her but a little ring belonging to her parents as a keepsake, a loaf of bread against hunger, a little pitcher of water against thirst, and a little chair as a provision against weariness.

And now she went continually onwards, far, far, to the very end of the world. (Colum, 1997: 138)

Here is the children's discussion:

Rachel	...she set out secretly didn't she?
Gareth	But her mother and father gave her a stool and a ring so they must have known about it
Rachel	Good point
Holly	Maybe they didn't know
Rachel	She took nothing with her but a little ring belonging to her parents as a keepsake and a loaf of bread against hunger and a little thingy of water against thirst and a little chair so she stole them didn't she if you think about it?
Gareth	But her parents gave them to her
Rachel	No they didn't look
Gareth	It's on the second page
Rachel	She yes...see what I mean...it does not say her parents gave it to her
Gareth	Yes it does...ring belong to her parents as a keepsake...a loaf of bread against hunger and a little pitcher of water against thirst and a little chair [unclear]
Rachel	But where does it say that her parents gave it to her...it doesn't does it?
Gareth	It doesn't does it
Rachel	So in a way she did steal it
Gareth	It does say she had no rest or peace until she set out secretly

Rachel	So Holly was right that she ran away...yes you're right...she did run away she stole things as well...I'm sure her parents don't mind but do you know what I mean...?
Gareth	It's not like her parents remember where they were so in the bad she ran away without telling her parents
Rachel	And ran away and stole
Gareth	And stole some things
Rachel	Which wasn't very nice
Holly	Naughty...she was only doing it 'cause she wanted to find her brothers
Gareth	It was love wasn't it that made her do it

(group discussion 26.3.03: 191 - 222).

In this extended dialogue, Rachel takes a leading role in interrogating the text for information about the girl's actions. The focus of interest is clearly on whether the girl acted well or badly. Convinced she has committed theft, Rachel argues – quite correctly – that the text does not state that the girl's parents gave her the objects she takes with her on her quest. From this she concludes that the girl 'stole' them. This would seem like harsh justice and Rachel continues to portray the girl as a runaway and a thief.

#### Mitigating circumstances

To soften the allegation, mitigating circumstances are considered by Gareth and Holly as in some way perhaps justifying the girls' apparently "bad" actions – the love for her brothers providing the motive for her journey. For Rachel, the parents' knowledge and approval also seems important as she imagines that the parents 'don't mind' her running away. The text does not inform the reader of the parents' reactions to the girl's choices; Rachel thus provides her own, again supplementing the text with additional material from her imagination.

### 5.13 Developing readers: James

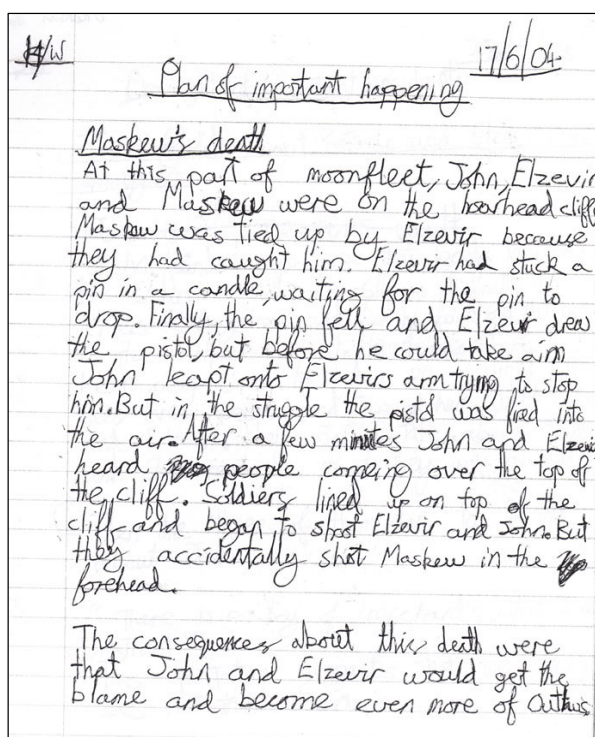
#### Musical talent

James also comes from a Catholic family on his mother's side and has one younger sister who joined the school when he entered year 10. He was both baptized and confirmed as a Catholic. He lives with both his parents and is an intelligent boy who is in the top sets for all his subjects. He is particularly keen on Science, the subject at which he is best though doesn't enjoy Art, Food Technology nor Graphics lessons. He started to play the guitar after year 7 and has since started a band called *Remains Anonymous* with some friends to play music together. James is also part of the school band that support assemblies and functions in the school like Awards Evening and church liturgies. Although not always a keen reader, James likes adventure stories with plenty of action and humour and has enjoyed Tolkien's middle-earth books *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. He also likes using the internet and playing computer games that involve role-play and action.

#### Reluctant excitement

James's main contribution was in responding to Meade Falkner's *Moonfleet*. He kept a reading journal about chapters 1 – 11 from 13.5.04 to 10.6.04 and discussed the story with me on several occasions and with another boy (Chris) from his class on their own. James from year 7 enjoyed the story and called it 'a great, exciting story' in his journal (13.5.04) and often comments on the behaviour of the main characters John, Elzevir, Maskew and Grace. He spoke and wrote about the main incidents in the first half of the novel, though at times seemed unwilling or unable to answer some questions. In these situations he would give negative answers like Holly of the "I don't know" variety. An extract from his writing is shown below in figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4: James' writing about Maskew in *Moonfleet*



James also very rarely spoke at length in his responses, though in the paired discussion with Chris he seemed more willing to do so. He was nervous and perhaps more inhibited by the one-to-one conversation; there is less evidence in James's contributions of a highly imaginative style of response, though there are moments of this often linked to events he considers significant and most evident at the end of the pair discussion. In general, he presents as a boy with some aversion to showing "enthusiasm" for school work, or for reading as a whole and this reluctance comes across in his dialogues and writing.

#### Touchstones of approval

In his journal he refers to characters who 'act or behave well' to use his phrase, seeming to indicate his approval of certain kinds of actions. These include John 'when he made the decision to hide in the coffin' from the smugglers in chapter 4 (journal 13.5.04) and Elzevir when he loses the 'Why Not?' Inn to Maskew in chapter 7 - to

which Elzevir 'didn't retaliate' (journal 14.5.04). They also include John again by 'stopping Elzevir from shooting Maskew' on the cliff above Hoar's Head in chapter 9. These incidents seem to represent significant touchstones for James' imagination, ones to which he gives his approval of the characters' actions in hiding, turning the other cheek and showing mercy to others - even when they may not deserve it - as with the character of Maskew.

#### Smugglers at large: Imagining *Moonfleet*

Both Maskew (a local magistrate) and John Trenchard (a fifteen year old boy) feature significantly in all of James's dialogues and in the pair discussion with Chris he imagines how John's initiation into the world of smuggling might take place after he has been discovered listening to the smugglers in the vault under Moonfleet Church in chapter 4 of the novel. Together with Chris, they invent a series of narratives about how events might unfold in order to consider the significance and consequences of John's discovery in the vault:

Chris	...people in the vault...said John was up to something spying I don't think that was fair 'cause they didn't know and he wasn't...but then Elzevir stuck up for him...
James	That's weird because they're saying all that about him and then
Chris	...and then they let him be a smuggler
James	I think he will become a smuggler...I think Mr Maskew will sneak onto the ship and John'll push him off...
Chris	Yeah 'cause he heard them
James	...into the sea and then he dies out at sea I mean right out at sea
Chris	I reckon that he'll get shot like Darren
James	I think he might have a duel
Chris	Yeah something like that I haven't read it
James	He'll probably miss...the bullet will probably go like this...[dramatising action]
Chris	The tape can't hear that

(Pair discussion 19.5.04: 62 - 75).

Several scenarios unfold here. Conflict with Maskew, death out at sea and then the death-defying actions of dodging a bullet are imagined as serious possibilities in their predictions. James's dramatisation of the bullet missing John shows an imaginative

engagement with the story that other children evoke using the voices of characters; here, acting the part is another way to imagine a possible consequence of discovery.

### 5.14 Developing readers: Anna

#### Life on the go

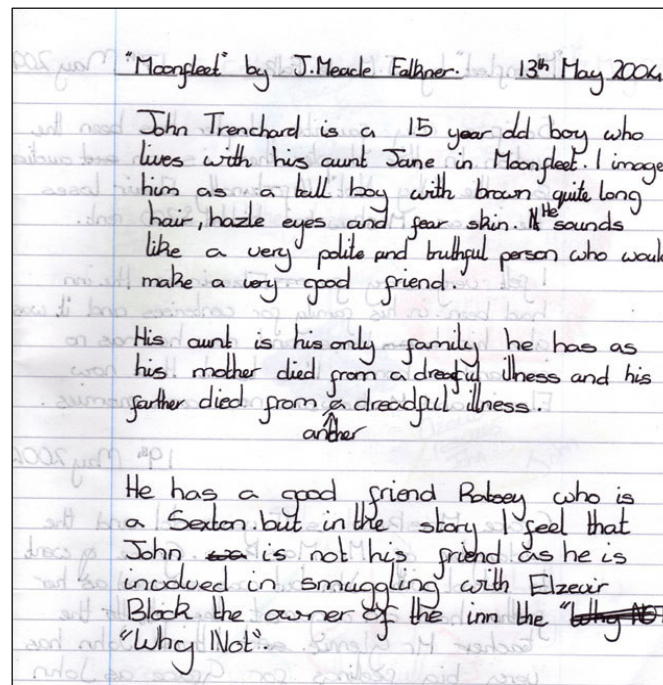
Anna is also a very intelligent girl who is in top sets for every subject. Unlike James, she loves to read and usually has more than one book on the go at once. She likes action and adventure stories, the *Harry Potter* series as well as the *Alex Rider* series by Anthony Horowitz and the *CHERUB* books by Robert Muchamore. Anna lives with her mother and father and her two younger siblings, a boy and a girl. Her father is a School Governor and her mother works in the Administration department of the school. Her family is Catholic though from a different parish to the school. Her favourite subjects are Graphics, French, Maths and P.E. but she doesn't often enjoy Science or German. Anna likes to take part in activities outside of lessons – she is in the choir, plays the piano and enjoys gymnastics, running, trampolining and netball. From year 7 she has taken part in several school drama productions including *The Sound of Music* and *Smike*. She loves to shop with her friends but hates Brussel sprouts, spelling and cabbage! She is a conscientious student with considerable maturity who likes to be involved in the wider life of the community.

#### Mature and imaginative purpose

Anna was in James' year 7 class and responded, like him, to *Moonfleet* in dialogue with me and separately with another girl called Sarah. She also kept a brief reading journal about the story during May 2004 as well as writing about "critical incidents" in the novel. An extract from her journal is shown in figure 5.5 below. Like James she wrote and spoke at length about the characters and incidents in the novel and often with

great maturity and purpose. It became apparent fairly quickly that Anna's engagement with the stories was highly imaginative and that the depths of her responses were of a different order to those of James. She collaborated well, for example, with one of her peers in dialogue about *Moonfleet*, discussing characters and actions in ways that sometimes lead to joint decisions about the justice of events.

**Figure 5.5: Anna's reading journal about *Moonfleet***



#### Banishment and unjust treatment

In the dialogue below, the girls are interested in how the characters in the story exercise justice and mercy. John Trenchard's involvement with the death of Grace's father becomes the occasion of their talk about how Grace and the villagers of Moonfleet responded:

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| Sarah | ...John and Elzevir were banished from Moonfleet  |
| Anna  | Yeah I don't think that was fair  |
| Sarah | I mean they didn't kill him   |
| Anna  | No I don't think it was fair that John was accused because...he was only a young boy and...he needed to have his life |

Sarah      Yeah there's one that is kind of fair...if you'd killed someone or [you'd] been accused of killing someone they wouldn't let you back into town but they let John back into town they looked after him again

Anna      Why?

Sarah      I don't know and what was fair was Grace forgave him...Grace didn't believe all the...rumours about him killing her dad because they get married

Anna      So fair they let John...

Sarah      ...stay in Moonfleet

(pair discussion 25.5.04: 47 - 64).

Working together, the girls decide it was 'fair' of the town to let John stay in Moonfleet after Maskew's death. Finishing Anna's sentence, Sarah concludes their evaluation of the mercy shown John over his involvement in Maskew's death, despite the fact that John did not actually kill Maskew directly. Sometimes, as here, it is hard to tell whether the children's interpretation of the word "fair" means "just", "good" or merely indicates that something is "approved" by them. Sometimes it is also difficult to tell who "originates" ideas; at times they are clearly jointly "negotiated".

#### Exploring reconciliation

What is clear, however, is that both girls understand that forgiveness reconciles whereas cold justice can sometimes separate communities or individuals from each other. Anna reiterates this later in the same dialogue as she continues to explore the meaning of Maskew's death, inferring how Grace 'must have' reacted to it. Here Anna uses her imagination for this purpose,

Yeah...it was also kind of unfair that Maskew had to die...because...he had a daughter and...yet...it says that Grace forgave John...so she must have heard the rumours that her father was dead and took it pretty well

(pair discussion 25.5.04: 68 - 72).

In the story, Maskew is shot on a cliff top by one of his own men whilst in pursuit of John and Elzevir and the tragedy of this event leads Anna to label it as 'unfair' (which could simply mean "not good" or bad). Perhaps suggesting how good may come



from evil, Anna imagines ‘she must have heard the rumours that her father was dead’ and taken it well enough to forgive John his part in the death.

#### Elzevir and John: Enacting virtue

Sometimes, like other children, she imagines the voice of a character in order to construct her own version of events in a dramatic re-enactment. Here she considers Elzevir’s relationship to John early on in the narrative and how he becomes a father-figure for him, dramatising Elzevir’s reasoning about his decision to help John and gaining an imaginative perspective on his ‘goodness’ or virtue:

...when John was trapped in the vault...when Elzevir rescued him I thought he treated him like his own son...and I thought *oh this is gonna be the way I'm gonna be now but he's gonna be my son...because Jane John's aunt had gone and kicked him out so I thought oh I was a bit John's on his own I need to help him treat him as my own son...*it showed quite a bit of goodness in him  
(interview 17.5.04: 61 - 69).

In this interesting passage, Anna takes on the role of Elzevir so enlarging her understanding of his character. She invents his thoughts – a common method of dramatisation I discuss more fully below – but also, most significantly suggests that she ‘was’ Elzevir for a moment, at least imaginatively. This kind of vicarious identification seems to help her in understanding the narrative but also in engaging fully with the choices and attitudes of the characters. After this interview, Anna told me that it helps her ‘picture’ herself ‘as the “I” or main character of the story to really understand it’, a point I recorded in my journal (2.6.04) and consistent with the findings of others concerning children’s identifications while reading (e. g. Benton, 1983, Protherough, 1983). She shows plenty of evidence of this in her responses, often linked to a search for the meaning and purpose of characters’ actions, choices and virtues.

## 5.15 Summary and Conclusions

Six developing readers

In this chapter I have outlined the contexts for the research. These included the school, the English department and the St Mary Centre where I collected the data. I also described the choices of texts I read with the children and suggested some ways that my own classroom pedagogy affected the shape of the research and data collection. I then presented short vignettes of each child responding to some of the stories. First Gareth who enjoys taking sides, Holly whose weaker overall comprehension leaves gaps in her responses and Darren who enjoys looking at characters from ‘another angle’, imagining their inner lives. Then Rachel, who becomes interested in the morality of running away when responding to *The Seven Ravens* and James, who was often reluctant to reveal much of his feelings. Finally Anna, who tries to understand the alienation between different groups in the novel *Moonfleet*.

Narrative constructions

With their unique voices, responding to the moral dimension of fiction is an exciting adventure that takes the children towards the goodness and badness of character – to a focus on virtues such as courage, friendship and love. Their often passionate interest in what motivates characters, in how their choices are enacted and the consequences that attend them within the “worlds” of the texts are constructed according to imaginative principles closely related to those upon which narratives are constructed. Throughout the examples I have given, children work together or individually employing a range of strategies to understand the meaning and significance of moral actions in the stories taking on new roles, perspectives and attitudes. In the chapters that follow, I discuss significant concepts I have introduced

here such as narrative touchstones, dramatisation and alternative narratives. I also discuss how they function in the development of the child's moral response to literature and the moral imagination.

## Part Three:

# Understanding children' strategies in responding to the moral dimension of fiction

'The imagination makes thought more personal and gives the individual a more authentic kind of participation in his or her environment.'

(Nadaner, 1988: 206)

## Chapter 6

### Making choices: Children's use of moral touchstones

'Touchstone: *2 fig.* A thing which serves to test the genuineness or value of anything; a test, a criterion.'

(*SOED*: 3349)

#### 6.1 Introduction

A frequent feature of moral response

Throughout this chapter and those that follow, I prepare the ground for the later analysis of a mode of children's response to reading fiction called moral rehearsal and the development of children's moral imaginations. I begin by discussing what I call moral touchstones as a strategy of children's response to fiction, then consider children's own moral concepts referring to character. I then look at a range of examples of how children select moral touchstones for discussion and the use they make of them in formulating moral and imaginative responses. Later I consider why some children do not always select moral touchstones in their responses in relation to methodological and theoretical concerns. At the end of the chapter I summarise the main types and purposes of moral touchstones.

#### 6.2 What are moral touchstones?

Personalising the story

Moral touchstones are a frequent and widely used feature of the children's responses in the data of this study; without exception all the children summoned incidents, characters and event-sequences in their own words from the texts as the basis of their responses. Because they are individually selected, however, their use and kind varies considerably across children. To this extent they represent part of each child's very personal approach to the stories he or she read. Moral touchstones appear frequently

as incidents, event-sequences or characters that have moral salience for the children discussing them. They appear to provide the means to test their moral ideas, to learn about the moral life and to make ethical judgements or evaluations about characters, the treatment of others and moral causality.

#### Personal salience

In the data of the children's dialogues they are often linked to conflict in the stories or to existential and spiritual questions arising for children from the stories. They represent a specific means for children to initiate a reciprocal dialogue about the text in which evaluation and exploration are key purposes. As such, their selection by children represents an important strategy in making moral responses to the stories and in developing aspects of their moral imaginations. As a response strategy, their selection has the immediate advantage of allowing the child to focus on personally salient and morally interesting features of the text. Their selection also reduces the amount of text necessary for recall and allows the child to interact with aspects of the narrative of meaning and significance to them.

#### Internalising significance

One reason for this is that in the children's dialogues moral touchstones appear to be the subject of what I call alternative narratives. These are the child's own narratives made from elements of the original text empathetically reconstructed into new or alternative narrative structures. They appear to allow the child to consider the significance of the original without the distraction of what might be, to the child, extraneous, insignificant or uninteresting material. In one of the examples below, I introduce this strategy in more detail and devote the next chapter to further examples. Moral touchstones therefore combine the economy of shorthand but allow a depth of extended response by the child. Most importantly, because stories - as I argued in

chapter 3 - can have an important role in shaping children's inner and outer lives (Coles, 1986a, 1989, Kilpatrick, 1994), selecting moral touchstones is a strategy that appears to enable children to explore the meaning and purpose of stories and to internalise their moral significance. I discuss this process at length in chapter 10.

A focus on choices and conflict

Throughout the study, the children showed significant interest in moral touchstones focused on choices characters make and what I referred to earlier as the sources of morality within the narratives – the intentions, motives, consequences and circumstances of moral actions (*Catechism*, 1994: 1750, Kreeft, 2001: 183). Closely related to this is their recurring interest in moral touchstones about relationships and how these are dramatised by the narratives. In fact, the presentation of moral virtue in all of the stories provides opportunities for the children to explore and evaluate moral conflicts and often to consider other aspects of the human condition such as risk, danger, hope, suffering or death. Many of these properties of moral touchstones are related to the exercise of freedom and responsibility and constitute an imaginative portrayal of the moral life that reflects the child's experience, is interpreted according to it (Bettelheim, 1975) but can also, I argue, enlarge the child's moral imagination.

### **6.3 Critical incidents**

Dialectical transactions

All the children in this study experienced in varying degrees what Lewis (1961: 129) called primary encounters with the texts, although these were sometimes adumbrated by classroom responses in my lessons. At times I could hear “echoes” of my own contributions to class discussions or the contributions of other children in the children's dialogues setting up what might be called dialogic voices within their

responses (Bakhtin, 1981: 275 - 276, Maybin, 2006: 75 - 77). These sometimes also grew into transactions that could also be seen as dialectical – employing a process by which children returned to key incidents a number of times in different dialogues, so developing their understanding, modifying or extending it as it became adjusted to or challenged their prior experience (as suggested by Rosenblatt, 1985, Edwards, 1986, Ryken, 2000b).

#### The wounded finger

A good example of this is the incident in Grimm's fairy tale *The Seven Ravens* in which the girl in the story cuts off her finger in order to effect the opening of a magic door to a glass mountain where her brothers are held under an enchantment. Gareth, Holly and Rachel – as well as the children responding with them – returned numerous times to this incident expressing a range of responses from shock to admiration. For example, in their group discussion about this story, Rachel begins with a simple statement about the “badness” of this action, saying ‘it was bad that the girl had to chop off her finger’, which she repeats later in their talk. She sees it, at first as an obligation or compulsion of some sort, but is then challenged to see it differently by Gareth:

Gareth	Yes but she must have been that devoted to find her brothers
Rachel	But we can still put it down as a bad part though...she shouldn't have needed to [cut off her finger]
Gareth	It's cause she lost the stick...

(group talk 26.3.03: 144 - 147).

Devotion to its object – the freeing of her brothers – would seem to be a different motive than necessity and after further discussion with Gareth and Holly, Rachel extends her response beyond this to include the concept of “care”. She begins by questioning or wondering about this, then with more confidence she states ‘cared so



much' as the motive for the girl, after which she begins to compare herself to the girl in the story:

Rachel	We could always put that the sister cared so much that she chopped her finger off...don't know whether I would for my little brother
Gareth	I think you would I know your little brother
Rachel	How?
Gareth	I know you...your mother as well...through cubs

(group talk 26.3.03: 295 - 301).

### Redemptive suffering

In this dialogue with the text and other readers, Rachel develops a more confident and developed response to the motives of the protagonist and in the process begins to question her own affections and how far they extend to a member of her family. Although she does not resolve this in dialogue, the incident is clearly a moral touchstone for the children in organizing their responses to the moral dimension of the text. It seems to provide an image of self-sacrifice against which to test Rachel's experience, enlarging her understanding of duty, devotion and care for others; a moral vision of the nature of redemptive suffering from the *inside* (Kilpatrick, 1992), an "icon" for her imagination that gives shape to her moral world (Milne, 2005: 102).

### Exploring significance

Although there are significant variations, the children in this study all chose similar incidents across the stories they responded to in order to organize their thinking about the texts. Often, these are composed of the actions of characters and highlight their behaviour, though sometimes the focus is on other aspects of the incidents, such as where they took place or their later consequences. Like Hamlet in his search for the truth about his murdered father in Shakespeare's play, the children appear to search for a moral touchstone against which to test their ideas when exploring what Hirsch (1967) calls the significance of the meanings of the stories they respond to.

Such moral touchstones that they chose are often based on critical incidents in the text that provide the means to test their own moral ideas, to learn about the moral life and to make ethical judgements about character and the treatment of others. They also often contain examples of characters' moral choices and express moral conflicts in the stories. In literary terms they could be seen as examples of what Sidney once called 'speaking pictures' that illuminate the imaginative and judging power of moral perception; images that give shape to human experience (Duncan-Jones, 1989: 217, Howard, 2005: 58). This is because the central actions in every valuable story are those in which characters make choices; indeed, it could be said that one definition of character itself is "values in action" (Taylor, 2002: 412). All the children in the study tried to make sense of what *value* could or should be put on the particular choices and actions of characters.

## **6.4 Constructing alternative narratives**

### New narratives

In considering moral touchstones, children appear to use the original text in a range of creative ways. One of the most important of these is what I call constructing alternative narratives. Built from or on elements of the original text, these consist of empathetically restructured or completely new narratives about the original that reflect children's moral concerns about the story. Sometimes they are simple retellings but sometimes they introduce new material that extends the original narratives, comments on or modifies it in some way. I consider one example here in relation to the child's use of moral touchstones.

### Snakes, spiders and bears

Courage and adventure are concepts frequently explored by the children in relation to most of the stories, even the shortest - *The Flowers* by Alice Walker. In this dialogue,

Gareth and Ryan bring their own concerns and concepts about children's fears and freedom in the face of adventure to the original story. In the process they create a series of alternative narratives around the original text. In response to the way in which the main character Myop has the freedom to roam the woods by her farm in the Deep South of 1930s America, they evoke a fairytale world of fears. Imagining snakes, spiders and bears – none of which are present in the original text - lurking in the forest they consider themselves alongside the protagonist of the story:

Gareth	Would you have gone into the forest on your own...the deep forest that goes on for miles?
Ryan	No
Gareth	You wouldn't have when you were ten...
Ryan	Depends if I was interested in forests
Gareth	Yeah because say you were stuck like somebody who lived in a town in the middle of a place then there was a huge forest there would you go into it at your age?
Ryan	Yes
Gareth	You would with nobody with you?
Ryan	No not with nobody with me
Gareth	No but she probably out of experience she knows what's in there
Ryan	Yes apart from the skeleton
Gareth	Well yes she knows that there's snakes and she got to be aware so maybe she thinks it's safe
Ryan	If I knew there were snakes in there I would scream and wouldn't even go in there
Gareth	She probably had experiences of snakes and she knows what to do but somebody who lives in a town probably wouldn't know what to do and probably...wouldn't go in there on their own so I don't think I would
Ryan	No neither would I
Gareth	I wouldn't in the dark
Ryan	I definitely wouldn't in the dark and there again it would be dark in the forest even if it were day time
Gareth	Well yeah anything could be in there
Ryan	Snakes lizards spiders
Gareth	Says in USA as well...bears
Ryan	Yeah tarantulas...

(pair discussion 10.4.03: 76 - 107).

Imaginative counterparts

However, this game of “let's suppose” is imaginatively related to the text because of the main character Myop. Imagining themselves in her place, they consider the risks involved in a kind of rehearsal that evokes the probable dangers involved. In the story it is daytime but their discussion ends in the night where ‘anything could be in there’,

including their own fears. For both boys, the story offers an opportunity to measure their experience and prior knowledge against the moral touchstone of the main character's actions and choices. In doing so, their own concepts of fear, dark forests, safety and danger effectively act as imaginative and subordinate counterparts to the world of the text and yet are evoked from it in order to explore its meaning and significance.

A dialectical discourse

It is clear that the moral significance of these alternative narratives is in the flexibility they allow both children to explore their ideas about the limits of freedom, danger and safety and to express their own fears about the moral implications of such choices as entering a forest alone, unaccompanied by an adult. In this way, the story of Myop's walk in the forest becomes the occasion for their imaginations to place themselves within a view of the world in which innocence engenders fear of the dark and experience the wisdom to know what should be avoided and why. Safety and danger, innocence and experience, knowledge and ignorance all emerge in a kind of dialectical discourse in which imagination is the mediator between child and text (Ryken, 2000b: 45).

## 6.5 Invoking the imagination

The choices of Elzevir Block

In another example, James discusses what is undoubtedly one of the most moving and powerful moments in Meade Falkner's *Moonfleet*. In chapter 9, Elzevir Block and John Trenchard (the narrator and main character) find that their enemy Maskew falls into their hands by a stroke of luck. As revenge for the killing of his son David, Elzevir holds a pistol to Maskew's head, ready to execute him on the cliff face where

they had been running from the excise. In a moment of dramatic moral choice, Elzevir weakens, realising somewhere in his being that to kill Maskew would be wrong. However, it is only John that prevents him doing so by knocking the pistol from his hand. In a final ironic twist, Maskew is shot by one of his own men some minutes later in the confusion and struggle on the cliff. Here is part of Meade Falkner's account:

It was an unequal struggle, a lad, though full-grown and lusty, against one of the powerfulest of men, but indignation nerved my arms and his were weak, because he doubted of his right. So 'twas with some effort that he shook me off, and in the struggle the pistol was fired into the air. (Meade Falkner, 1983: 110 - 111)

#### Moral struggle

The moral struggle that takes place in both characters in this incident was the subject of much discussion with James and Anna's year 7 class. "Why does John intervene?" and "Was Elzevir right to try to shoot Maskew?" were two questions we discussed and the fact that this incident is an important turning point in the narrative. I also asked James about the choices Elzevir makes on the cliff, which included saving John's life:

James	He could've killed Maskew or he could've just let him go...because he shot his son and he'd probably go away and tell everyone about being smugglers
Res.	When you said he could have killed Maskew...was there any doubt in his mind do you think about killing Maskew?
James	...yeah a bit...because his arms went all weak...'cause...he sees like Grace...I think he should've left him...I probably wouldn't've shot him but kept him...like keep him locked up so he can't tell anyone
Res.	...Where would you have taken him?
James	I don't know anywhere...could leave him on a ship 'cause then he can't tell anyone and he [Elzevir] doesn't get told off...it wouldn't seem like the right thing to kill him but you can't really let him go he'd tell and get loads of soldiers

(interview 24.5.04: 101 – 142).

### Considering consequences

In this example, James imagines several scenarios or alternative narratives, but also brings his own moral concepts to bear upon the incident in order to help him evaluate it and to internalise its significance. Two ideas seem especially important in his prior knowledge – ‘telling’ on someone and ‘the right thing’ to do. In this sense, James utilises this moral touchstone to consider the possible consequences of Elzevir’s actions as well as alternative courses open to him. This process of moral rehearsal is similar to one that Fesmire (2003: 69 - 70), following John Dewey, refers to as ‘dramatic rehearsal’ – the crystallizing of possibilities and transforming them into directive hypotheses. In this case, James suggests locking Maskew up on a ship to prevent him “telling” – informing on Elzevir’s smuggling activities.

### Moral attributions

It is interesting to note that James also supplies Elzevir with a reason or motive for the weakening of his resolve – a reason not specified in the narrative. Grace is Maskew’s daughter with whom John is in love and James imagines that Elzevir “sees Grace” at the moment his arms weaken, perhaps because she would be hurt by her father’s death. In fact, Grace is at home during this incident so James’s response suggests the “seeing” is Elzevir’s imagination or conscience. It is almost as if James attributes Elzevir with his own moral imagination, an ability to make decisions founded in moral vision. If moral principles like those embodied in this incident from *Moonfleet* only make sense within the context of certain visions of life then stories and the characters and incidents in them may give us the power to see things clearly because they show us what other lives are like from the inside (Kilpatrick, 1992). Indeed, the context of such moral touchstones about which the children responded

are not only objective to the text's meaning, but also subjective, deep within whatever the child finds of moral significance:

Each man is unique and unrepeatable, and *the good never appears twice in exactly the same form*...Every man must be prudent and brave in his own way...[but] the goal of virtue is one – to foster and protect the human good. (Jaroszynski and Anderson, 2003, p. 44 - 45, emphasis mine)

So with moral touchstones, good and evil appear under various guises; for James, Elzevir's moral struggles are a vehicle for his own developing understanding of the relationship between the deliberating imagination and moral choice.

#### Imagination and emotion

It appears, then, that in the strategy of selecting moral touchstones to which to respond, children's imaginations and emotions also appear to be important to what might be called the moral salience (or significance to borrow Hirsch's term) of the incidents in the stories to them. This implies, of course, that children may have quite different ideas about what is of particular significance to them in a narrative, and this is certainly evident in their responses. However, there is much that is shared in their interests, and where different moral touchstones are selected, the concerns of individual children often overlap. I take up the important question of emotion again in chapter 9.

## 6.6 Understanding circumstances

### Eustace and the dragon

Sometimes the circumstances of moral choices become moral touchstones for the children's reflections as in the situation surrounding Eustace's transformation into a dragon in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. This incident elicited a lot of talk in the

children's dialogues and here Rachel considers the circumstances from more than one perspective:

...he got into trouble he went up went to sleep...he just lied there I think...and he said *oh we [I?] could have been here for hours* 'cause he couldn't see the others so he went down but he went down the wrong way and then he found a dragon...so slightly strange...he turned into a dragon himself which I think he deserved a bit really so it's gonna be interesting I think to find out if the others find him and if they're like *no keep away from me whoever you are* they'll be quite scared of him

(interview 24.6.03: 248 – 255).

At this point, Rachel had not read the rest of the story so she predicts what might happen when Eustace the dragon meets the rest of the ship's crew. This touchstone becomes a way for her to link together actions and circumstances as well as to imagine herself as Eustace who, like Spenser's knight wanders 'the wrong way' only to find 'a monster vile, whom God and man does hate' lying in wait for him at the bottom of a valley (Maclean and Prescott, 1993: 9). The image of the 'way', drawn summarily from the text provides a metaphorical shorthand for Eustace's moral as well as geographical errors and the voices Rachel creates (not present in the original text) express Eustace's indifference to the others and their possible fear of him as a dragon. The dramatisation of this dual perspective enables her to grasp both the circumstances of Eustace's actions as well as the potential consequences, making for a rich perception of the relationships involved and preparing her to understand Eustace's isolation and how it is broken down by Lucy and Aslan in the narrative.

#### The restoration of evil

If the meaning and purpose of life is largely to be found within a series of relationships to others (Kreeft, 2001: 184), then the symbolism of Eustace's errant wandering while the crew repair *The Dawn Treader* becomes an appropriate metaphor for what happens when selfishness dominates our actions – it leads to 'Error's den'. Metaphors of this kind, suggests Guroian (2005), can illuminate our 'darkened



intellects’ and warm ‘our frozen hearts’, resonating ‘with the deepest qualities of our humanity’:

They enable us to envision a world in which there are moral norms and limits, a world in which freedom respects the moral law or pays an especially high price. (Guroian, 2005: 61)

The price of Eustace’s “freedom to choose” is an evil enchantment that takes forgiveness by a greater power to undo it. It is also, as Rachel implies, isolation, fear and broken relationships that are only restored by suffering and pain.

## **6.7 Love and responsibility**

Realising goodness

Children’s conceptions of love and responsibility are dramatised in many ways in the children’s dialogues. Love is expressed and “incarnated” in a range of ways in the stories discussed by the children and their comments show that, as a virtue, it finds its way into many of their imaginative moral touchstones, especially those concerned with friendship, affection and to some degree charity (Lewis, 1960). In this way, the children appear to gain an enlargement of the possibilities for virtue by entering the beliefs and attitudes of fictional others. They also begin to understand characters’ efforts to attain or share goodness with others and to realise a capacity for goodness (Pieper, 1991). Sometimes this is a very direct process as in this example in which Darren enters into the thoughts of Edmund in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* as he decides to befriend Eustace after his experiences as a dragon:

I thought he [Edmund] felt really sorry that Eustace had to go through all this torture...and wickedness so he thought *oh well he’s being going through a bad time so I think I might sort of be his friend and help him...be nice to him for a bit*  
(interview 1.7.03: 402 – 406).

A kind of double empathy is at work here as Darren imagines himself as Edmund empathising with Eustace's suffering and taking his side in the fight against 'torture...and wickedness'.

#### Moral scrutiny

Sometimes this enlargement is a shared process negotiated through discussions that bring conflicts of opinion, interpretation and response together in a search for shared significance of character and action. In the following example (also referred to in chapter 5), Holly joins a small group discussion about *The Seven Ravens* in which Gareth and Rachel subject the protagonist's actions to an intense moral scrutiny:

Rachel	...she set out secretly didn't she?
Gareth	But her mother and father gave her a stool and a ring so they must have known about it
Rachel	Good point
Holly	Maybe they didn't know
Rachel	She took nothing with her but a little ring belonging to her parents as a keepsake and a loaf of bread against hunger and a little thingy of water against thirst and a little chair so she stole them didn't she if you think about it?
Gareth	But her parents gave them to her
Rachel	No they didn't look
Gareth	It's on the second page
Rachel	She yes...see what I mean?...it does not say her parents gave it to her
Gareth	Yes it does...ring belong[ing] to her parents as a keepsake...a loaf of bread against hunger and a little pitcher of water against thirst and a little chair...
Rachel	But where does it say that her parents gave it to her...it doesn't does it?
Gareth	It doesn't does it?
Rachel	So in a way she did steal it
Gareth	It does say she had no rest or peace until she set out secretly
Rachel	So Holly was right that she ran away...yes you're right...she did run away she stole things as well... I'm sure her parents don't mind...do you know what I mean?
Gareth	It's not like her parents remember where they were...so in the bad she ran away without telling her parents
Rachel	And ran away and stole
Gareth	And stole some things
Rachel	Which wasn't very nice
Holly	Naughty...she was only doing it 'cause she wanted to find her brothers
Gareth	It was love wasn't it that made her do it?
Rachel	Yeah
Holly	Yeah

(group discussion 26.3.03: 191 – 224).

In search of motives

This interesting discussion focuses on the setting out of the main character in search of her brothers in the story. The children seem very concerned here, and elsewhere, about the morality of her departure and whether in fact she stole the things she set out with – the ring, the loaf, the water and the chair. Employing the concept of ‘running away’, drawn from their own experience and not given in the original text, they imagine the girl stealing items from her parents. Using the text itself helps them settle the question of theft against the girl; in fact, such an inference is plausible, but so would be the inference that the parents did in fact give them to her though it wasn’t stated in the text – it remains a ‘place of indeterminacy’ (Ingarden, 1973: 50ff). Having decided upon this response, it is qualified by the parents “not minding” or being unable to ‘remember’ where the items were, so presumably again “not minding” about their daughter taking them.

Most significantly, however, is the ending of this passage in which all the children agree that ‘it was love...that made her do it’ suggesting her motivation and perhaps legitimising her actions, even though they might appear ‘naughty’. The secrecy and independence of the girl in this response is based on the text but extended by the imaginary tolerance of the parents and justified in relation to her motive – love of her brothers. Like the other stories responded to, this fairytale provides a narrative context for such moral inferences and sets the virtue of love within the drama of a recognisable situation – a young girl leaving home to rescue her brothers – providing an image of self-sacrifice that is realised through trial and hardship.

### The virtue of love

These kinds of fictional trials are essential in providing moral touchstones for the child's imagination from which the conscience may be instructed and upon which a storied vision may be developed that sets virtue and moral choice within an accessible, narrative context (Meilaender, 1984, Kilpatrick, 1994). Love, in this example, covers over many faults; it also provides, in the context of this kind of reading response, the kind of transport or "escape" to a region more central to our being, setting before us 'an image of what reality may well be like at some more central region' in which the virtue of love, of self-sacrifice, is the highest realisation of what it means to be human (Lewis, 1947b: 93, Pieper, 1991).

For the children concerned, it provides a touchstone for their own understanding of such sacrifice and the ways in which growing up means taking independent responsibility for our actions. Such enlargements of the child's "stock" of moral images, of the clothing that should adorn what Burke (1790) called the 'wardrobe of the moral imagination' are - as I suggested in chapter 2 - essential to the development of the child's concepts of virtue.

## 6.8 On justice

### King Caspian on trial

There were times when the mysterious character of human nature caused some consternation to the children, especially in relation to the various traits that fictional characters appear to possess, not all of which sometimes make sense to a child. As in everyday life, this multiplicity can be difficult both to comprehend and to relate to, yet it is surely part of the richness of human life. The propensity of characters, as in reality, to tell the truth one moment and then appear to lie the next was the focus of a

dialogue with Darren who found the character of King Caspian in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* a challenge to his conceptions of truth, leadership and justice. In what might be described as an example of reading as an ‘act of recreation’ - looking forward, looking back, deciding, changing our mind and forming expectations only to have them unfulfilled (Iser, 1974: 288) - Darren’s solution to this challenge was to create a new concept – ‘multiple’ - to accommodate aspects of Caspian’s character and actions that he found difficult to reconcile:

Caspian he's pretty truthful he's like...multiple he is like he's truth like once he said...*all your men are being treated badly* and everything like all the horses were very like ill groomed but he still rode them 'cause he knew that it was a horse he didn't treat it badly just because it looked different...that's like treating a person badly just because they're deaf or they've got bad eyesight...he's being truthful like he sticking with what he wants to do...

(interview 17.6.03: 253 – 301).

In this extract about truth-telling, Caspian’s integrity is on trial. At one point in the story, Caspian sends messages deliberately designed to deceive Gumpas about the size of Caspian’s army approaching the Lone Islands. Caspian’s trick succeeds and Gumpas is overthrown but for the children discussing this incident, like Darren, it appeared necessary to assert his truthfulness in the face of the deliberate deception of an enemy. In an earlier dialogue, Darren had maintained that,

Caspian was pretty dishonest for sending the lie but I thought it was pretty brave because if Gumpas had've found out he was lying he's putting like loads of people at the risk of death... 'cause they'd have just attacked him 'cause he thought there was thirty forty boats when there was really just one

(interview 17.6.03: 173 – 177).

#### Adopting multiple perspectives

Darren’s later choice of the term ‘multiple’ was, I think, an attempt to account for Caspian’s “multiple” behaviour – a respected leader one moment, a cunning and deceiving fighter the next. Darren did not like the idea that Caspian might be perceived as a liar, as he clearly states later in the same dialogue:

Because he's like a leader everyone looks up to him if he goes and lies everyone will think *ah well Caspian's lied to us ...we can't trust him* 'cause it's like saying *I'm going to be in there in the battle with you* but if they don't turn up at that battle...it's crucial to them 'cause he's like a saviour...like a person they look up to...like a father you go to them for advice but if he says lies to you and you go and do that like say something and you lie and you tell them to go somewhere...they're going to be in the wrong place and [at] the wrong time...  
(interview 17.6.03: 293 – 301).

By adopting multiple viewpoints himself, Darren demonstrates his own willingness to enter others' perspectives but also how the nature of truth-telling is related to just actions. He juxtaposes Caspian's promise as a leader to '*be in there in the battle*' against the attitude of 'everyone' – presumably his subjects - who would be unable to trust him if he '*lied to us*'. More interesting, perhaps is his use of imagery for Caspian to reinstate his authority in the face of lying to Gumpas' army by giving false signals from *The Dawn Treader*. He compares Caspian to 'a saviour', 'a person' to 'look up to' and 'a father' to whom 'you go...for advice'. These images become a shorthand for Caspian's saving power for the Lone Islanders, his authority and perhaps for Darren's own admiration.

#### Authority, power and truth

His recognition of the relationship between authority and truth is also interesting in the context of the just application of Caspian's power as the ruler of Narnia to defend the freedom of his subjects. Gumpas, it should be recalled, has permitted and exploited 'an abominable and unnatural traffic in slaves' (Lewis, 1955: 49) to flourish on the Lone Islands, contrary to the customs and laws of Narnia, and Caspian is determined to stamp this out. He also wants to reclaim large debts owed by Gumpas to the 'crown of Narnia' in the form of a yearly tribute unpaid for 'about a hundred and fifty years'. Darren comments extensively on this in another dialogue with Simon, in which he identifies how Gumpas 'wants anything as long as he can be ruler', is only

interested in ‘money and power’ and is addicted to it ‘like a gambler’ (pair discussion 16.6.03 : 58 – 68).

#### The politics of fairyland

In the politics of Narnia - what Thomas Aquinas called the summation of all man’s active cares about securing his existence (Pieper, 1989: 121) – authority and power are related to truth and Darren seems aware of the importance for rulers of exercising their authority with the truth of justice itself otherwise the trust given by those ruled is abused and lost. By voicing Caspian’s promise and identifying images of authority Darren shows an implicit understanding of the political landscape of the story, but also of the related moral landscape. The connection between justice and truth, according to Thomas Aquinas, is that truth ‘shines more brightly in justice than in any of the other moral virtues’ and clearly it is through distributive justice that rulers must take the common good into account whilst respecting, at the same time, the dignity of the individual and giving him what is his due (Pieper, 1966: 66, 92ff).

Such images or touchstones of justice and political will are important in the development of the child’s sense of the other and their place in the power structures of their culture, though these cannot easily be tied to developmental sequences or patterns (Coles, 1986b). The responses of Darren and other children to such imaginative touchstones could be said to enlarge children’s sense of permanence, shaping their sense of reality about the limits of authority in relation to the individual and the need for justice to effect the good and to defeat evil. This takes courage, of course, another way in which the virtues are linked together:

It is a liberal illusion to assume that you can consistently act justly without ever incurring risks: risks for your immediate well-being, the tranquillity of your daily routine, your possessions, your good name, your public honor – in

extreme instances possibly even more: liberty, health and life itself. (Pieper, 1989: 67)

### Models of permanence

Reading and responding to fiction, I have argued, can provide the kind of (vicarious) models children need to experience of such risk-taking in the service of the good in order to develop their ethical perception. As a kind of spiritual *askesis*, stories that embody such permanent aspects of human experience can arouse a kind of longing that gives the actual world, on returning to it, a new kind of depth, a moral depth gained through the surrender involved in literary reception (Lewis, 1952, 1961). The demands of justice ‘beset man at his spiritual core’ for ‘man is the subject of justice to the extent that he is a spiritual being’ (Pieper, 1966: 66) and throughout the children’s dialogues, there is evidence that they are aware of the many sides to man’s spiritual nature, including the existential questions of suffering and death and the imaginative contexts in which they arise within narratives.

## 6.9 Spiritual identifications

### Eustace and Aslan

A good example of this is Eustace’s transformation and suffering as an important touchstone in the children’s responses to *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. The dilemma in which Eustace finds himself and his eventual release from it by Aslan the Great Lion of Narnia invites many questions about the nature and purpose of suffering and about the consequences of our actions. For example, here Darren takes the voice of Aslan thinking about Eustace’s dilemma and how to help him,

Aslan knows he's learnt his lesson from being a dragon 'cause now he's being feeling sorry for the people doing the work he wants to be a human again so Aslan thought *why make this man suffer when he's learned this lesson?*  
(interview 1.7.03: 90 – 93).



## Belief and existence

This kind of existential and moral probing about “lessons learned” by or from characters is evident in children’s responses to other texts as well. For example, after discussing John Trenchard’s discovery of the smugglers in *Moonfleet*, Anna considers how his aunt’s beliefs may or may not have influenced John. Going well beyond the text again, Anna tries to explore what makes John a good character and how he is seen by others in the story,

- Anna      I think his aunt might be a strong believer in Christ and I think John might follow that from his aunt...Aunt Jane might have gone to church once might have been going to church but in the story because of the floods it says that she doesn't want to go...so John trudges along by himself
- Res.        You say that she might be a believer in Christ does that make any difference to them do you think?
- Anna        I think it might be when they act they might think *oh if I do this will it be disobeying God...or will it be doing the right thing?*
- Res.        Do you think that has any influence on the sort of character that John is?
- Anna        I think it might affect the way people see him because I think people might see him as a truthful boy but yet he knows this story of the smugglers and yet he may make a few lies trying to get out of not knowing...

(interview 17.5.04, 225-250).

Alert to the presence of the Church in the story, Anna suggests that Aunt Jane ‘might be a strong believer in Christ’, that is a Christian. However, she goes on to explore how belief can affect action in terms of obedience or disobedience to God and in terms of ‘*doing the right thing*’. This she clearly connects with the idea of being ‘truthful’, suggesting that the ethos of John’s family may influence the views of others about him.

## The sources of *character*

In some ways, Anna is perhaps trying to understand the source of John’s character, the candidness that makes him trusted by the smugglers yet still, as the story progresses truthful, courageous and faithful. Once again, she dramatises the collective

voice of John and his aunt asking themselves how they should act, how in essence they should live and according to what principles (Coles, 1997). Aunt Jane becomes a kind of moral touchstone for certain beliefs in the story to Anna, again enabling her to explore how belief, action and consequence are not isolated from the influences of family or community and how virtues like obedience to a higher moral law must be exercised amidst a life together, affiliated and joined to others (Pieper, 1966, Booth, 1988).

## **6.10 The absence of moral touchstones**

A question of quality

In the analysis I have undertaken, I have assumed that the children in the study generated moral touchstones as a strategy of response to stories. In general terms, this was so. However, as I discussed earlier in chapter 4, it is often difficult in case study research to establish generalisation or validity partly because of researcher bias and the reactivity of its methods (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989, Merriam, 1998, Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). Because of this, it is important to mention that there were apparent differences of degree in terms of the children's generation and use of what I call moral touchstones. These differences appear to cluster around both the quantity and quality; the quantity of touchstones perhaps reflecting a general level of understanding, or possibly the child's ease with the data collection method.

Negative cases

James in interview for example, gave many brief, undeveloped responses about *Moonfleet* that referred to a more limited number of incidents that were clearly moral touchstones for him in some way. In paired discussion, however, his responses appeared more animated and to a degree, more imaginative. Holly (who would qualify

as a "negative" or atypical case, Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989) also gave a significantly greater number of negative responses such as 'don't know' or 'I'm not sure what you mean' that limited the ways in which she articulated her responses in a fewer number of moral touchstones. Both Holly and James appeared initially to enter into less dramatisation of characters' voices than the other children – a fact that for Holly may be associated with her mild autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) as children with this difficulty are known to experience problems with communication, play and social interaction. Taking the perspective of others and understanding intentionality are also problematic for children with ASD and may also help to explain this feature of her responses (Jones et al., 2001, The National Autistic Society 2006). For James, this may have simply been a function of familiarity and ease with the talk context.

#### Fuzzy generalisations

In one instance, Natalie - the girl whose data I decided not to use as she only came to one lunchtime session - identified only one incident in the text that she seemed to want to discuss beyond monosyllabic statements. She appeared to employ the use of moral touchstones as a strategy in an absolutely minimal sense. This may have reflected her generally poor level of comprehension, but it could also have been related to the unfamiliarity with the situation and the distance between her reading of the text and the session she came to. In all three cases, the context, including the backgrounds of the individual children may have had a significant influence on both the quality of data and the type of data (reading responses) I collected (Coles, 1986a). Because of this, the concept moral touchstone - as well as the concepts that follow - are kinds of naturalistic, 'fuzzy generalisations' (Bassey, 1999, 2003) or 'assertions' (Stake, 1994, 1995) that suggest, in a qualified way, what strategies are highly *probable* in children's responses on the basis of empirical induction from the cases of this

study. Like Stake (1995) and others (e. g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Walker, 1986, Eisner, 1998), I invite readers to generalise the concepts to other populations of children in other schools, institutions or homes in order to extend them and examine their potential usefulness and ‘trustworthiness’ in other contexts (Bassey, 1999, 2003).

## **6.11 Summary and conclusions**

### **Icons of imagination**

In this chapter I have discussed how children employ moral touchstones in their responses to narrative texts. They seem to provide economic and imaginative vehicles to explore and evaluate the moral dimension of stories. Moral touchstones in children’s responses also appear to form the basis of reflection, interpretation and the search for meaning and purpose in reading and responding to the moral dimension of narratives. For the child they represent moral images or “icons” of imagination that incarnate the meaning and drama of human freedom and experience (Lewis, 1961, Kreeft, 1990, 2001). For the children in this study, moral touchstones provide a test or criterion by which children’s own ideas about characters, actions and narrative events can be explored in a rich and dialectical interplay between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1978: 20).

### **Multiple perspectives**

By adopting multiple perspectives in their explorations of moral touchstones, children may explore the nature of truth-telling, love or responsibility and their relation to the moral and political landscapes of narrative. In this way, exploring moral touchstones can further enlarge the child’s sense of permanence in reality and their understanding of the limits of authority and the justice applicable to the human polis. Engaging the child’s emotions, moral touchstones can also stretch the child’s capacity for thinking

about the “experiments in living” that constitute a story (Booth, 1988). Of existential importance, they can provide “windows” on the child’s moral imagination, enlarging the child’s reservoir of images, characters and ideas (Ryken, 2000b). They can also provide opportunities for the child to raise questions about suffering and death, how life should be lived and according to what principles (Coles, 1997).

#### Internalising significance

Most significantly, the selecting of moral touchstones appears to represent a key strategy by which children come to internalise the significance of the moral dimension of the text. Their own evaluations help this process as they reach out in dialogue towards the meaning and significance of what they have read. Sometimes this is a shared dynamic between children as they negotiate the significance of such moral touchstones (Hirsch, 1967) through trial and error and the use of shared meanings. Sometimes this involves children in creating alternative narratives - the child’s own narratives made by combining elements of the original text with additional but related ideas into new or alternative narrative structures. They appear to allow the child to consider the significance of the original without the distraction of what might be, to the child, less significant or interesting material. In the next chapter I examine alternative narratives as an aspect of the child’s moral imagination and their strategic role in the child’s moral comprehension of narrative.

## **Chapter 7:**

### **A sense of story: Children's development of alternative narratives**

‘...a literary text is...something like an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of the imagination.’

(Iser, 1974: 275)

#### **7.1 Introduction**

Strategies of the imagination

In this chapter I consider more specifically the role of the child's imagination in responding to the moral dimension of narrative. To understand the nature of moral choice and virtue in their responses to stories, the children in this study adopt a series of imaginative strategies. Central to these is the process of constructing alternative narratives – new narratives based on the existing textual narrative but subsequently transformed by their own imaginations in dialogue or discussion about the stories. These transformations appear to serve several purposes, including exploration and evaluation. Many different kinds of changes are made to the narrative to accommodate the children's search for meaning and purpose and to enable them to find meaningful stances towards the texts, their characters and their moral actions. As I have already suggested, moral experience - if it is to be meaningful to children - can benefit from a narrative context (Coles, 1986a, 1997) and in the examples that follow, children's imaginations are highly active in attempting to understand the meaning of the moral experiences offered to them in the narratives, albeit in a vicarious way.

Imagination mediates evaluation

In this and the next chapter I present a case for the importance of the imagination in the comprehension of the moral dimension of fiction – imaginative enlargements

upon the original text created by the interaction of text and imagination (Iser, 1974: 275). This is because imagination, as the ‘organ of meaning’

...producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition. It is, I confess, undeniable that such a view indirectly implies a kind of truth or rightness in the imagination itself...all our truth, or all but a few fragments, is won by metaphor. (Lewis, 1939: 265)

That imagination is a ‘condition’ under which reason apprehends ‘truth’ is a proposition with many implications. However, in the analysis that follows, it is clear that forms of children’s reasoning such as evaluation and exploration are supported and mediated by the imagination enacting alternative narratives with which to explore the moral world of the text.

## **7.2 What is an alternative narrative?**

Enacting the narrative

An alternative narrative is a new, imagined narrative constructed by the child based on the existing textual narrative but transformed by his or her imagination in response to moral touchstones in the narrative text. Very often, children’s responses take the form of stories themselves or enactments of narratives that develop or extend already existing events. Sometimes this involves comparison with the child’s own experience, sometimes with existing elements of the narrative. By extending the narrative in this way, children explore the moral significance of the meaning of texts and in turn appear to build their own sense of what is morally felicitous as opposed to merely possible (Guroian, 1998: 37).

A sense of story

At times, the children seem to create a range of these imaginative, alternative narratives when they wish to speculate about the possible consequences or motives

for moral choices. At others they invoke a “sense of story” in order to provide a recognisable and meaningful context for their own identification with characters (Kilpatrick, 1992: 27). Always creative, they invent new episodes or alter details of the physical world of the text, imagine and dramatise the voices of characters and even invent new voices in order to explore the range of responses a moral touchstone in the narrative might involve. If needed, they suggest analogies or use their own imagery drawn from their own experience in order to further explore the moral dimension of the text. In this way I suggest that children begin to enlarge their conceptions of the range of possible moral experience.

#### An experience of the concrete

The child’s use of such narrative structures – or what could be called *storying* – engages both the child’s reason and imagination in the process of making sense of moral choice and virtue in narratives:

The semantic structure of...storytelling includes such elements as making up reasons to account for actions, inferring the silent problem solving of...actors, creating images the better to deal with...meanings. (Sarbin, 1986: 12)

If the moral life is in any sense storied, then it must rely intimately on narrative structures to support the traditional role ascribed to reason in making judgements and evaluations of moral actions (Lewis, 1943b: 250, Day and Tappan, 1996: 68). It could be argued that imaginative literature can supply children with such narrative structures that support moral judgement. By portraying the choices of the acting person, fiction can provide children with an imaginative experience of the concrete, so enabling them to gain some understanding of what moral experience is like (Lewis, 1965: 149, Vitz, 1990: 718).



### 7.3 Storying

#### Virtual texts

Such storying is frequently observable in the children's responses as their imaginations take a role in selecting, comparing, inferring, arranging and revising the material of the narratives in order to make sense of their moral aspects (Sarbin, 1986). Sometimes this is by the creation of analogue stories with which to compare elements of the existing narrative, sometimes through the connecting power of analogy itself (Robinson and Hawpe, 1986). Narrative as a powerful vehicle in understanding moral experience constantly finds its way into the children's responses. As a result, what Iser (1974: 275) calls 'virtual' texts emerge that enlarge the existing narrative and in turn shape the child's response to the moral dimension of the text.

#### Duel to the death

Sometimes, this aids ongoing comprehension by providing imaginary narratives against which to compare the unfolding events of the story. At times, the children's involvement with this kind of storying is dramatic and playful, as in the example to which I referred in chapter 5 in which James and Chris predict what might happen to the characters in *Moonfleet*:

Chris	...people in the vault...said John was up to something spying...I don't think that was fair 'cause they didn't know and he wasn't but then Elzevir stuck up for him
James	That's weird because they're saying all that about him and then
Chris	...and then they let him be a smuggler
James	I think he will become a smuggler... I think Mr Maskew will sneak onto the ship and John'll push him off
Chris	Yeah 'cause he heard them
James	...into the sea and then he dies out at sea I mean right out at sea
Chris	I reckon that he'll get shot like David did
James	I think he might have a duel
Chris	Yeah something like that I haven't read it
James	He'll probably miss 'cause the bullet will probably go like this...
Chris	The tape can't hear that

(pair discussion 19.5.04: 61 - 75).

Enacting a dramatic moment, the boys imagine Maskew and Elzevir in a duel since they are enemies. This is both a prediction, but also a plausible inference given that the characters are enemies. James “acts out” the bullet missing Elzevir by apparently moving his own body or showing physically how it would fly through the air. As Chris points out, however, this would not be recorded by the tape recorder but illustrates the level of imaginative engagement that such alternative narratives generate as the children explore dramatic actions and character.

## 7.4 Evaluating the context of alternative choices

### Inferential landscapes

Several other examples however, will illustrate how children manipulate narrative elements, creating rich and imaginative variations on the text in order to explore its specifically moral dimensions. Alternative narratives in the children’s responses often focus on the moral choices of characters, including the actions, consequences and circumstances surrounding them. For example, when discussing the reasons why the girl in *The Seven Ravens* cuts her finger off to open the door to the glass mountain, Gareth suggests that her actions imply a kind of moral expediency linked to the lack of other “options”:

Yeah the...surroundings...there might it might've just been like a deserty land with no trees and no sticks...so that would've been the only option...but...if it was say...at the end of a forest then...but I don't know...it doesn't tell you about whereabouts she is apart from...at the doors of the glass mountain  
(interview 28.3.03: 174 - 178).

Grimm’s original contains, as Gareth rightly points out, no account of the landscape of the story, other than the presence of the Glass Mountain. However, Gareth supplies his own imagery consisting of ‘a deserty land with no trees and sticks’ and

‘the end of a forest’ as opposing possibilities. In doing so he “concretizes” an indeterminacy in the text:

In concretization the peculiar cocreative activity of the reader comes into play. On his own initiative and with his own imagination he “fills out” various places of indeterminacy with elements chosen from among many possible or permissible elements... (Ingarden, 1973: 53)

The absence and presence of trees are compared to help him account for why the girl cuts off and uses her finger to open the Glass Mountain. Doing this enables him to ascribe an action at which he was emotionally ‘shocked’ and ‘surprised’ to the circumstances in which she finds herself – one of the determinants of morality that I discussed above (e. g. Kreeft, 2001: 183). Gareth’s imagination, constructing possible landscapes from which to find alternatives to the girl’s finger supports his inference that ‘the only option’ the girl has is to use her finger by chopping it off to open the door. Imagining alternatives like this seems to help Gareth to validate the inference in some way, securing it within the imagined world of the text.

#### Imaginary battles

A similar set of considerations occurs to Anna when responding to the actions and choices of Maskew the excise man in *Moonfleet*. She suggests quite candidly what she “would have done” in his place – a common strategy amongst the children in dealing with characters’ choices. In doing so, she comes to evaluate his action concluding with an inference about his reasons for shooting Elzevir’s son David:

Anna	...I would've at least caught them all first and asked what they were doing and then maybe have killed them later
Res.	So what sort of choice was involved there?
Anna	...whether he should've taken the bullet used that bullet and whether to spare his life and asking about things
Res.	So why do you think he made that choice there then?
Anna	...probably because he was in like a battle and he had to act quickly and probably...the quickest thing to do was to...kill him
Res.	So what do you think about that?

Anna        I think it was horrible because he was only young...I think...it's made Elzevir and Maskew fairly close enemies they won't talk to each other they keep trying to get each other back for what each other have done

(interview 17.5.04: 201 - 216).

By considering alternatives, Anna is able to compare Maskew's actions (shooting and killing David) to those she 'would have' liked to have seen – capture, question then 'maybe' kill later. This modification of the narrative leads her to imagine the 'bullet' and to employ the image of the 'battle' to explain Maskew's actions. In coming to interpret the meaning and significance of Maskew's actions, seeing them as perhaps the 'quickest' thing to do though still 'horrible', Anna's imagination supplies alternatives for comparison with the text. She also supplies imagery ('battle' and 'bullet') about the events that acts as a way of condensing the essential ideas so that Maskew's choice to kill can be contextualised for explanation within an enlarged or fuller imaginative context. This becomes a kind of rehearsal, a process similar to the production of analogue stories suggested by Robinson and Hawpe (1986); in this case a rehearsal of imagined possibilities. Like Gareth, imagining alternatives appears to help Anna contextualise the inference that Maskew's action was 'the quickest thing to do' by comparison and consideration with other possibilities that might not have explained his actions so well.

## **7.5 Evaluating character using images and analogies**

### Metaphor-making

The importance of this kind of comparison in evaluating the moral dimension of story is also clear from the ways in which the children make connections between causal elements of the narratives using analogies and a range of imagery drawn from their own experience. The 'analogy-perceiving, metaphor-making' powers of the imagination (Barfield, 1973: 144) are further revealed throughout the children's

responses as they make imaginative connections between motives, actions and consequences in order to make moral sense of characters and their relationships within the narratives (Coles, 1989: 127).

#### A call to arms

In an interview with Darren for example, the role of King Caspian in the story became the subject of conversation and in particular what role Darren himself would have enjoyed in the story. He was quick to identify the role of soldier and the action of marching into the town of Narrowhaven on the Lone Islands with the King to oust the lazy Gumpas, Governor Incumbent. To explore this further, Darren brings his own experience and his imagination to bear up the reasons for this preference, and for his evaluation of the soldiers' actions in the story as 'brave':

You're brave and everything, you got to everyone relies on you and like you've got to be brave and stick up for yourself and like it's like one person representing a thousand 'cause like if in the war that one person...could save a load of people like they go out to fight... and if they don't succeed people at home are going to start dying like when the Americans and the British were against the Nazis if they'd have failed the Nazis would have taken over more continents so Germany would have been a humungous place...So like now there would still be Germans marching down the street...

(interview 17.6.03: 346 - 358).

#### Validating character

First he uses the pronoun 'you' to imagine the reliance put upon the ordinary soldier and the courage necessary to 'stick up for yourself' with both the senses of defending a cause and championing (*OED*: 34b) – in this case "oneself", or by association the Narnian cause in the story. This generalisation is followed by Darren's introduction of another analogy in which the imagined soldier is likened to 'one person representing a thousand' suggesting the democratic and substitutionary role of the armed forces, acting on behalf of a people – in the case of the story, the people of Free Narnia. By comparing the imaginary actions of King Caspian with those from

his own experience, Darren seems to provide a kind of evidence for his *inference* that King Caspian is 'brave'. His imaginative analogy, once again appears to help to "validate" the inferential process he goes through about the character's actions.

The meaning of courage

The imagery he employs, so suggestive in itself, reinforces his exploration of the meaning of courage linking it, for Darren, to the need at times to defend a cause, to represent others even in war:

...all fortitude has reference to death. All fortitude stands in the presence of death...every courageous action has at its deepest root the readiness to die, even though, viewed from without, it may appear entirely free from any thought of death. (Pieper, 1966: 117)

This connection becomes clearer when Darren refers to the 'people at home' who will 'start dying' if they are not defended. In order to further explain what for him is the importance of courage in a soldier, he then summons another analogy, drawing on his prior knowledge of world war two and offering a familiar, yet powerful comparison. By using a conditional "if...then" construction he emphasises the consequences of failure in the defence of freedom as well as the position of the soldier in relation to this, again themes with which Lewis himself was very familiar:

All that we fear from all kinds of adversity...is collected together in the life of a soldier on active service. Like sickness, it threatens pain and death. Like poverty, it threatens ill lodging, cold, heat, thirst and hunger. Like slavery, it threatens toil, humiliation, injustice and arbitrary rule. Like exile, it separates you from all you love. (Lewis, 1940b: 292)

Leather and battered steel

Darren too, is interested in the conditions of the soldiers in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, as were the rest of his class. Not only this, but he was also very keen to discuss the slave trade that the crew of *The Dawn Treader* discover when they arrive at

the Lone Islands. Discussing the condition of the armour of Gumpas' men, Darren and Simon engage in lively exploration of the contrast between Lord Bern's men and those of Gumpas:

Darren     ...but with Lord Bern like you said he's like a family to 'em he treats them with more respect like his men are well armoured and got the right equipment and like he said like his men are like men at arms got all this brand new clothing and everything...like proper warriors but with Gumpas' men  
Simon     It's wood and leather  
Darren     Yes it's just like leather and battered steel mushed together just like  
Simon     It's all rusty  
Darren     Yeah all rusty and bent and everything 'cause like you're not going to get an army of ten thousand with rusty armour against an army with armour brand new

(pair discussion 16.6.03: 43 - 56).

Here the boys' imaginations supply material for comparison and discussion again by using analogies ('he's like a family') in an alternative narrative about the conditions of war and battle. These seem to be constructed from a combination of their own concepts and imagery about soldiers' conditions. Elements of the text are also altered to accommodate their moral exploration of the comparative treatment of the soldiers by both leaders - its justice and relative merit. In the original story, only three references are made to the condition of the men, both of which seemed to have prompted this discussion. In chapter 4, the narrator states that Caspian's men 'marched up the street so that the street shook, and their armour shone (for it was a sunny morning) so that one could hardly look at it steadily'. Then later, the guard at Gumpas' gate is described as having 'a rusty old pike in his hand' and Gumpas' guards within his castle as having 'armour...in a disgraceful condition' (Lewis, 1955: 44 - 46).

#### Imagination and inference

Darren and Simon supply wood, leather, battered steel and rust to enlarge their imaginative understanding of the state of both armies, concentrating on the physical

elements of the situation in order to make a moral evaluation of the justice of Caspian and Bern's invasion of Gumpas and of Gumpas' treatment of his own soldiers. In this way, the physical condition of the men's weapons and armour becomes a kind of metaphor for the relative goodness of their leaders, the 'rusty' condition of the armour – commented on by Darren below - emphasising the moral neglect and degradation into which Gumpas' army and kingdom has fallen. To support this, Darren's use of the analogy with 'a family' separates Caspian and Bern's treatment of their men from Gumpas' by anchoring it in both his own familiar world and in the realm of a supportive and caring community – a theme Darren enlarges upon elsewhere in his dialogues. By using his imagination, Darren surrounds the inference that Bern treats his men with 'more respect' with evidence imagined on the basis of a small number of textual details. Imagination here, as in the previous examples, provides the condition upon which plausible inferences can be made about the text, enlarging its significance for the child in terms that are familiar and understandable and that reflect their experience and prior knowledge (Lewis, 1939: 265, Pressley and Afflerbach, 1995: 100).

#### Prize possession

Like Darren, the other children also invent alternative narratives to explore and evaluate the stories they respond to. For example, in chapter 5 of Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, Juana, the wife of Kino the Mexican pearl fisherman tries to throw a pearl that her husband finds earlier in the story back into the sea. Kino stops her as he has come to value the pearl almost above all things; in doing so he beats her savagely on the beach. All the children in the study were fascinated and often horrified by this incident and it is one to which they return frequently in discussion. Asked why Kino



could not let go of the pearl, unlike Juana who was prepared to throw it back into the sea, Gareth responded,

'cause he's the owner of the pearl he's found this pearl it's like say you found twenty pound in the street you'd wanna keep it but then say someone come up to you and said *have you found a twenty pound note?* you wouldn't really want to give it back to them...it's like he's found the pearl in the sea and he doesn't really want to give it up he wants to keep it but he knows he shouldn't because it's bringing evil...to him it's like his prize possession

(interview 10.11.03: 250 - 256).

Gareth's explanation here involves a comparison or analogy that enables him to compare the incident in the novel with his own experience, but also to begin to explore the themes of possession, justice and greed. The comparison Gareth makes is part of a more extended exploration of why Kino keeps the pearl. It seems to help Gareth infer that the pearl has become 'like his prize possession', another analogy suggesting its importance for Kino as compared with Juana his wife.

Finders keepers

The novel as a whole is a powerful exploration of such themes and by dramatising an imaginary scenario involving the finding of money, Gareth brings his own experience of finding and keeping, so central to the novel, to bear on this incident, illustrating the drama involved in a simple and everyday form. It is especially interesting to note that Gareth dramatises the role of the one seeking the money and then summons an imaginary 'you' being unwilling to 'give it back'. Although he does not expound on the analogy, it is at least highly suggestive of the whole moral tenor of Steinbeck's parable; Kino the finder of the Pearl of the World sought and finally hunted by a cast of "someones" in pursuit of the pearl along with the wealth and financial rewards it represents to them.

A connecting logic

Other analogies provide the basis for alternative narratives elsewhere in the children's responses. Sometimes, as in the example above drawn from Gareth's memory and experience, they provide a kind of connecting logic through which the moral dimension of the narrative can be explored (Egan, 1992: 62ff). At other times, they appear to help to unify ideas into patterns of meaning and allow the children to express their understanding concretely and concisely. In all cases, the children's imaginations provide an enlargement of context or condition from which inferences or explanations can spring on the basis of their own sense of the meaning and significance of the text.

## 7.6 Evaluating roles and conflicting voices

Narnian voices

Sometimes, children's imaginative responses identify the physical consequences of moral action in the story, enlarging upon those of the text. These are then elaborated into alternative narratives that allow them to explore the meaning of the story. Often, this is accompanied by the dramatisation of different roles and voices. In Darren's responses for example, he dramatises the voices of Gumpas and of Bern's soldiers attacking the castle in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*:

...it's like if they'd knocked on the door then just barged in they'd have been alright 'cause he [Gumpas] gave them saying *someone's coming in and everything...*'cause they was angry 'cause like they had been treating the slaves and everything bad and like seen all these men and all this battered armour that wasn't very good...Simon also said that the rusty armour can give you diseases like get infections in your cuts...you die for...they [Bern's men] were trying to set a point saying *we're on business we're not here to mess around we want to get these points set down...*

(interview 17.6.03: 53 - 66).

Invoking another narrative that is invented and an alternative to the original text provides a way for Darren to further explore the roles of Gumpas and Bern's soldiers when attacking Gumpas' castle. Here the voices (absent from Lewis' story) are Darren's additions, extending and enlarging the world of the text, developing the moral drama of the conflict between the rightful King Caspian and the greedy governor who is unwilling to acknowledge his position as subject.

#### Stripping the knight

This kind of imaginative participation is reminiscent of one of Lewis' suggestions about the role of reading imaginative literature I alluded to in chapter 3:

Instead of trying to strip the knight of his armour you can try to put his armour on yourself; instead of seeing how the courtier would look without his lace, you can try to see how you would feel with his lace; that is, with his honour, his wit, his royalism... (Lewis, 1942: 63 - 64)

In this case, his cowardice or courage – 'the kind,' says Lewis elsewhere, 'that faces danger,' and for which '...you cannot practice any of the other virtues very long without bringing this one into play' (Lewis, 1952: 73). For Darren, imaginative enlargements upon the original story offer new insights and understanding as well as supporting exploration and evaluation of the moral dimension of the story. His previous experience as well as his powers of invention, his ability to summon images and analogies, to create metaphors and develop comparisons, to dramatise voices and participate in roles all contribute to the creation of alternative narratives that enlarge the original text – supporting the creation of a 'virtual' dimension of text (Iser, 1974: 275).

### The heart of identity

At times, children's enlargements become more than analogical, creating comparisons that have a wider significance. A good example of this is Holly's image of the "heart" to which I referred in chapter 5. Listening with the heart seems to be the source of strength for the girl in *The Seven Ravens* according to Holly; however, this is not referred to at all in the original text:

...she became strong but maybe her heart would've too...her heart might have made her strong she might have kind of listened with her heart and gone off and done it

(interview 31.3.03: 128 - 131).

This kind of identification, built from Holly's own images suggests the importance of the 'heart' to Holly's own sense of identity. It also reminds us how much the framework for all literature is concerned with the loss and regaining of identity (Frye, 1964: 55). For children, this means that character becomes a vehicle for their own imaginative solutions to this problem so constructing the analogies and metaphors that connect characters with their action, a central power of the moral imagination (Guroian, 2005).

### A world turned upside down

The nature of the moral world, so important in the fairytale, becomes the occasion of an interesting alternative narrative by Rachel in responding to C. S. Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. The story, I would suggest, certainly qualifies for Tolkien's (1947: 14) definition of *Faerie* as embodying 'the realisation of imagined wonder', but also remains consistent in its imaginary presentation of 'the relation of live souls' and the ethical choices that confront them (Macdonald, 1999: 6). Lewis refuses to turn such laws upside down merely for effect so that a character like Eustace for example, who

tries to ignore the basic courtesies of ethical conduct, soon finds himself blaming others for his own moral shortcomings.

Rachel focuses on this in part of a discussion, using the same image of a world gone ‘completely upside down’ in which Eustace seeks to blame others out of his own self-righteousness:

Eustace...I suppose he's a bit of a liar really...Eustace can't do nothing wrong he's always right and he had to blame someone else if something goes wrong like if he said *do this* and it went completely upside down he'd say *oh it was Lucy that gave me the idea* and Lucy would go *no I wouldn't [didn't?] thanks*  
(interview 24.6.03: 434 - 452).

#### Conflicting voices

Like Darren above, she summons up two voices to help her exploration of Eustace's conduct creating an alternative narrative that consists of a mini-dialogue between Eustace and Lucy completely absent from the text. The central image of a “world completely upside down” evokes a conflict of values, the kind about which Rosenblatt says,

The text presents us with a whole network of...codes, embodied explicitly or implicitly in its personae and its situations...The literary transaction may thus embody...an interplay between at least two sets of codes, two sets of values...in this process, too, the reader weaves...responses into an utterance sensed as a particular voice of a particular kind of persona. (Rosenblatt, 1978: 56 - 57)

Clearly it is Rachel's imagination that ‘weaves’ the voices of Eustace and Lucy around the central image of a world turned ‘upside down’, synthesising and organising her response on the basis of her memories of the characters and of her evaluation of their respective “values”. In so doing, she creates two “personae” that enact the conflict in her imagination dramatising what is a kind of moral attribution (Coles, 1986a: 234) - to wish constantly to blame others for our own faults, as Eustace does. In this

example, it is again Rachel's imagination that supports her inference that Eustace is a 'bit of a liar', enacting a proof in terms that clearly show her understanding.

## 7.7 Just sentiments and the evaluation of moral conflict

The horror of violent death

In the example referred to above, when Anna uses the analogy of a 'battle' to describe Maskew's conflict with Elzevir's son David in *Moonfleet*, the alternative narrative she creates also expresses an emotional response that supports her search for the moral significance of this episode. In chapter 1 of the novel, the narrator describes this incident only in passing, relating that 'Maskew drew a pistol and fired it off in young David's face' capturing the violence of the attack that killed him (Meade Falkner, 1983: 14). No bullet is mentioned, though clearly a conflict is implied. In Anna's response, it is also the horror of the action and its consequences that interests her:

...because he was in like a battle and he had to act quickly and...probably...the quickest thing to do was to...kill him...I think it was horrible because he was only young

(interview 17.5.04: 207 - 211).

In creating an alternative narrative, Anna appears to use the image of the 'bullet' I referred to above to concretise the deliberateness of Maskew's actions, and to enable her imagination to grasp the horror of such a violent death inflicted on one as young as David in the narrative. The analogy of the 'battle' serves a similar function, highlighting the conflict and enlarging its significance from a personal settling of accounts to one of two parties at war. In fact in the story, the main conflicts arise because of the "war" between the Excise and the Smugglers, two different groups with "two sets of values" that conflict (Rosenblatt, 1978).

### Meaningful contexts

Elzevir, David and Maskew are the representatives of such values in the world of the novel and Anna shows her own horror at the conflict by using the word ‘horrible’ with some emphasis in the dialogue. She does this, it should be noted, only after she has “modified” the narrative by suggesting alternative courses of action such as taking prisoners. Once again, it is Anna’s imagination that provides the meaningful context for more reasoned explanations and inferences about Maskew’s actions and character. As I described it in chapter 5, Anna herself reported to me after an interview conversation about *Moonfleet*,

It helps me to understand the story if I can picture myself as the main character or in the story...as long as I can imagine myself as “I” I can understand the story  
(Field Notes 17.5.04: 13).

The link between the emotional impact of the narrative and Anna’s imaginative response is important for it helps establish her stance towards Maskew’s actions – that he could have taken prisoners first, or could have spared David’s life.

### Ordinate affections

Such imaginative opportunities can be helpful for children in developing their ability to distinguish objects of moral choice and possible responses to them. In dialogue with teachers, parents and other representatives of authoritative moral communities, they may also help children to distinguish between just and unjust responses:

When the age for reflective thought comes, the pupil who has been thus trained in ‘ordinate affections’ or ‘just sentiments’ will easily find the first principles of Ethics...[he or she] must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likeable, disgusting and hateful. (Lewis, 1943a: 15)

In fact, Anna's response rehearses the horror we should feel at such a 'horrible' and untimely death, according such a murder what St Augustine called *ordo amoris*, its just or ordinate affection.

## **7.8 The absence of alternative narratives**

### Variations in response

Like the concept of moral touchstones as a strategy of response which I examined in the previous two chapters, the concept alternative narratives must be considered a 'fuzzy generalisation' induced from a small number of cases by a process of theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Bassey, 1999, 2003). This is because, although the children in this study all exhibited a tendency to employ alternative narratives as an evaluative and meaning-making strategy, there were variations in the degree to which they did this. In fact, such responses range from "no response" to a response that is discursive but apparently lacking in a distinctively imaginative engagement. This could, of course be because the imaginative process is not reported or verbalised by the child, not necessarily because it does not exist for the child.

### Re-cognition precedes evaluation

Darren and Gareth for example, exhibit a wide imaginative range of alternative narratives in their responses suggesting their enthusiasm for the texts but also their ability to enter "other worlds" with empathy and engagement. Anna too shows regularity in employing a range of alternative narratives throughout her responses, often combined with emotional engagement and the evaluation of character. Rachel's responses varied in their application of this strategy, sometimes depending on her level of comprehension, at times entering into joint evaluation with her peers. When



tentative about her understanding, she did not appear to use this strategy perhaps suggesting that although it can be used to develop and extend comprehension, the recognition of meaning must precede evaluative strategies such as this in the overall search for the moral meaning and significance of texts (Hirsch, 1967: 24ff).

#### A role for emotion and empathy

Both Holly and James were the least likely to directly exhibit this imaginative strategy. James however, did exhibit a predisposition to dramatisation and to imaginative prediction using alternative narratives, though his apparent willingness to enter empathetically into “other voices” was less – perhaps due to shyness, lack of interest in the question-answer format of interview conversations or an observably mock-playful attitude to peer-involved tasks such as pair-work. Holly whose Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) I discussed earlier was the least likely to use alternative narratives that involved dramatising voices or creating analogies. Her level of evaluation however, is consistently strong in her ability to imagine what she “would have done” (often in a critical way) and her affective responses are frequent, strong and often connected to straightforward and confident evaluation using terms such as “naughty”, “good” or “evil”.

#### Other voices

However, I sense that sometimes her strong application of these *a priori* categories mitigates against her ability to entertain other voices or perspectives in moral dialogue. Children with ASD sometimes exhibit difficulty taking the perspectives of others, a skill essential for successful social interaction (The National Autistic Society, 2006). The use of alternative narratives as a response strategy could be considered a way to develop this kind of skill and I suggest that children like Holly may benefit socially and morally from practicing or rehearsing these kinds of imaginative,

empathetic responses. Once again, I invite readers to compare other children's responses to fiction to those in this study for evidence of this strategy.

#### Remaining questions

A question that remains is how far the absence of alternative narratives restricts or inhibits the ability to make inferences in responding to the moral dimension of narrative. Is there, for example, a *certain* relationship between levels of understanding, power of explanation or inference about the moral dimensions of narrative text and the ability to generate alternative narratives that extend or modify the text? I would suggest, given the apparently more limited understanding of the stories shown by, for example Holly and James that a relationship *may* exist. Alternative narratives are commonly generated by the children when evaluating the moral dimensions of the text and in explaining this in answer to questions.

#### A helpful strategy?

Other questions also remain. Whether for example, the creation of alternative narratives is a strategy that is consistently helpful in the comprehension of narrative text, or whether in fact it could interfere with comprehension by creating confusion in the child's mind between virtual and original texts. Although this does not appear to be so, it could perhaps be suggested by the ways in which children merge original and virtual texts in their responses. Also important is whether alternative narratives are a natural strategy for children in other modes of discourse – for example about narrative settings or wider social contexts. Again, this may be suggested by the presence in the children's dialogues of these aspects of narrative, despite a focus on the moral dimension of text.

## 7.9 Summary and conclusions

Rehearsal, evaluation and exploration

In responding to the moral dimension of fiction, the children in this study clearly use their imaginations in a range of ways to help them make sense of text. Creating alternative narratives that extend the original narrative appears to support them in evaluating and exploring the nature of character, moral choice and virtue in response to moral touchstones in the text. For,

as long as we are conscious, we are faced with various possible courses of action and we must choose between alternatives, even if one of the choices is not to act at all. (Jaroszynski and Anderson, 2003: 31)

In this way, alternative narratives can have a rehearsive purpose as well as serving an important function in the children's search for textual meaning and significance (Hirsch, 1967: 211). At times, these consist of imagined possibilities consistent with the text or possibilities that resist or modify the text (Booth, 1988: 285ff).

The mediating imagination

At other times these alternative narratives consist of images, analogies and metaphors constructed or developed from textual elements and synthesised with the child's prior knowledge, their memory, experience and emotion. Sometimes, inferences form the basis of this kind of alternative narrative, as in the example discussed earlier of the inferred 'battle' being fought between Maskew and the smugglers in Anna's responses to *Moonfleet*. This kind of empathetic reworking of text appears to form the basis for an enlargement of meaning and significance and the creation of 'virtual' texts (Iser, 1974: 275):

To think...is one thing, and to imagine is another...if we are going to talk at all about things which are not perceived by the senses, we are forced to use language metaphorically...anyone who talks about things that cannot be

seen, or touched, or heard, or the like, must inevitably talk *as if they could be* seen or touched or heard. (Lewis, 1947a: 112 - 115)

Because of this, explorations and evaluations of meaning and significance are therefore mediated by the children's imaginations and support the making and explaining of inferences about character, moral choice and virtue. In this way, the child's imagination plays a vital role in the 'massively inferential' process necessary for comprehension (Pressley and Afflerbach, 1995: 95) and in making concrete the nature of moral response. The imagination also plays a role in supporting children's identifications with character in the invention of voices and the dramatisation of various personae, connecting the child to the search for identity which is such an important theme in much narrative art (Frye, 1964).

#### Unifying actors, acts and consequences

By storying in response to narratives, the children's imaginations select, compare, infer and synthesise material in ways that suggest a rehearsive function to the imagination. The production of analogue stories in exploring characters' choices and the dramatisation and enacting of different voices for example, also allows children to practise the negotiation between different roles and values so prevalent in fiction (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978, Robinson and Hawpe, 1986). In this way, the narrative structures important for moral life may be enlarged and developed; especially those concerned with the making of vicarious "ordinate" or "just" responses to fictional others. Alternative narratives, therefore, help to build the connecting logic of the moral imagination by unifying actors with their acts and consequences. Within this logic, the place of emotion is important in supporting children's growing ability to distinguish between conflicting claims on their affections, whether of love, hatred, liking or disgust (Lewis, 1943a: 15).

### The ludic imagination

Under the revealing power of the imagination, children's moral response to fiction has a playful, ludic quality consistent with the logic of imagination itself as a sense-making, meaning-making capacity (Egan, 1992). In the next two chapters, I examine further the dramatic power of children's responses to the moral dimension of stories and how these engage their emotions in a continuing search for the meaning and significance of text.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Children's dramatisation of fictional voices**

'Books are embalmed voices. The reader's job is to disinter them and to breathe life into them.'

Benton (1992: 17)

#### **8.1 Introduction**

Imaginary voices

Throughout the data I collected on children's responses to story, the use of invented or imaginary voices – like the creation of alternative narratives – is a ubiquitous feature. Every child who participated showed evidence of using this strategy for approaching the moral dimension of narrative. Because of its frequency, it deserves a chapter of its own, though strictly speaking, dramatisation emerged as a sub-category (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 119) of the children's use of alternative narratives, the strategy I examined in the last chapter. Without exception, the children used imaginary voices to enlarge upon the text and to support their explorations and evaluations of moral dimensions to the stories. Some children however, appear to have a greater preference for this strategy or are able to employ it more effectively. Darren, for instance employed many types of voices in his conversations both with me and with his peers. Holly on the other hand was much more restricted in her use of this strategy, only evincing a few examples throughout her conversations. In the discussion that follows I examine a range of examples drawn from the main types of dramatisation evident in the children's data.

## 8.2 What is dramatisation?

An act of imagination

Clearly linked to the children's selection of moral touchstones, dramatisation appears to provide vicarious experience of the perspective of others through the child's dramatic and imaginative creation of unspoken dialogue (Iser, 1974: 292). Dramatisation can be defined as an act of the imagination by which some children create the voices of characters in the narrative to which they are responding and enter into them in role during a response. This often takes place as part of children's explanations or evaluations of events, or as an illustration of events. Dramatisation also appears as part of explanations or illustrations of character more broadly and can take the form of single voices or multiple voices in dialogue or conversation. Used to represent characters' thoughts as well as speech, dramatisation appears to be used with the sort of sentence structures, tonal variations and emphatic stresses common to ordinary speech (e. g. with a sarcastic tone or whispering). As a form of narrative construction in the imaginative sense, dramatisation might be considered an expression of narrative thought (Vitz, 1990) or a form of rehearsal in the psychological and moral sense (Wood, 1988: 56, Bohlin, 2005: 36 - 37).

Beyond comprehension

Throughout the children's responses dramatisation is often found as part of the construction of causality or making choices— a consideration of the motives, actions, consequences or circumstances of an event – and creates a range of perspectives on these events. It is therefore a way of understanding the moral and existential significance and meaning of events (especially moral choices) from the point of view of imaginary others and so may represent an aspect of empathy or identification. This suggests a role for dramatisation as a strategy that enables children to move beyond

comprehension into a wider search for the meaning and purpose. In this respect, the children in this inquiry appear to have a special interest in fear and courage and in the virtue of friendship.

#### Constructing subtexts

As a response to literature, dramatisation is shaped by both the text – and especially certain moral touchstones to which the child responds – and by the social setting of the discourse of response and the tasks given for response (e. g. semi-structured questions in interview). As a reading response, it is used in connection with various reading strategies such as questioning and predicting but inference seems to have a central role in its operation – often in the exploration or construction of the subtext of characters’ thoughts or motives, or of possible consequences:

In our speech there is always the hidden thought, the subtext...Thought itself is engendered by motivation, i.e., by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency... (Vygotsky, 1986: 150)

Dramatisation thus also appears to be linked to emotional engagement with the narrative and appears as an expression of this. Like alternative narratives more broadly, dramatisation may help the child to form attachments to particular events or characters. I begin by considering how children employ imaginary monologues embodying the thought and speech of fictional characters.

### **8.3 Monologues of thought and speech**

#### Of bread and water

Of the many examples of this mode of dramatisation, some are introduced during response as clear examples of thoughts ascribed to the character by the child and not necessarily – in fact rarely - depicted in the text. These “gaps” or indeterminacies in



text provide opportunities for children's imaginations to invent the "missing text", filling in "implied" dialogue or monologue (Iser, 1974: 272, Booth, 1988: 204). As such they represent part of children's use of alternative narratives as a strategy for understanding the significance of the moral dimension of story. Often, but not always, they are linked to the motives or intentions of the characters' actions and choices (see below) and indicated by the child's use of the word "thought" or "thinks". For example, in responding to the Grimm's story *The Seven Ravens*, Gareth explains what is happening at an important point in the story at which the main character, a young girl, leaves home to go out and rescue her brothers who have been turned into seven ravens. Important here for Gareth - as well as for the other children who discussed this story - is the thinking that he imagines accompanies her choice to leave home - an important touchstone for all the children who responded to this story:

...she's obviously thought about...how long she gonna be there because she's taken a bread loaf...some water...and...because obviously you get wells but she obviously thinks ahead...*what in case there isn't any?*...and also...the stool in case she gets tired...and like the ring...I'd say that was...more like...enthusiasm...if she's like thinking of giving up she'll think like...*this is my parents...my brothers...*and then she thinks of her brothers and she thinks *no I've got to carry on...*  
(interview 28.3.03: 103 - 110).

#### Questions and statements

The use of questions like '*what in case there isn't any?*' is quite common in dramatisation. Many of the examples contain questions, as if enacting a role involves questioning the character's imaginary world from a variety of perspectives - to gain understanding and a firmer grasp of the moral and existential world of the text. In addition, the use of factual statements like '*This is my parents...my brothers*' is also a common feature of dramatisation. In this example Gareth dramatises a factual statement of the girl's primary relationships to reinforce the sense of urgency she might have about her task,

but also to explain – both to himself and to his listener – the essentially moral nature of her quest and what the motivation is for her to ‘*carry on*’. That one must not give up, despite the potential for failure is an important message for children, one that many fairy tales contain. Here, Gareth identifies with the character’s determination by casting himself for some moments into her role (Bettelheim, 1975: 33 - 34).

#### Switching gender

By presenting the girl’s perspective in this way, the obligation she feels becomes part of an imaginary narrative that explores the meaning of her leaving home and the motives that impel her to do so. In the Grimm original, the girl ‘took it to heart daily’ for the loss of her brothers,

and thought she must save her brothers. She had no rest or peace until she set out secretly, and went forth into the wide world to search for her brothers and set them free, let it cost what it might. (Colum, 1997: 138)

For Gareth the journey and the temptation to give in becomes paramount in the girl’s imagined thoughts, as does the ‘cost’ referred to in the narrative, a topic to which all of the children in the study returned many times. It is noticeable however, how easily Gareth is able to adopt the voice of a girl, switching gender without hesitation. This confidence he carries over into other voices in his conversations.

#### The un-dragoning of Eustace

Another example of the way in which a character’s thoughts can be dramatised beyond what is supplied by the text shows how various kinds of inferential thinking can be attributed to characters and used to understand their perspective on both character and virtue in the classical sense (e. g. Meilaender, 1984: 18ff, Bohlin, 2005: 20). Discussing the characters and how they treat each other in C. S. Lewis’ *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Darren was interested in the way in which the relationship

between Edmund and Eustace changes from enmity to friendship. This happens in chapter seven as a result of Eustace's un-dragoning by Aslan and is revealed mainly through a long dialogue between the two characters. Again, the narrator of the story never actually reveals Edmund's thoughts, only his spoken responses to Eustace's recount of his encounter with Aslan.

#### Making friends

Darren, however, summarizes what he imagines Edmund's thinking to be, emphasising the main point – becoming friends – and the importance of the fact of the choice involved:

'cause I thought like I thought he felt really sorry that Eustace had to go through all this torture...and wicked...ness so he thought *oh well he's being going through a bad time so I think I might sort of be his friend and help him...be nice to him for a bit...*

(interview 1.7.03: 403 - 406).

Exploring the nature of friendship and the making of choices are two important functions of dramatisation. In this example, at least, Darren's use of dramatisation seems to allow him to summarize a character's experience in terms he can readily understand as well as to experience imaginatively what the kind of choice to befriend another in distress might involve. It represents here then, a way of seeing 'with other eyes' (Lewis, 1961: 137) what making friends might be like in certain circumstances and of perceiving the ethical significance of the plight of others and our responses to them for good or ill.

#### Character attitudes

Responses that dramatise the spoken voices of individual characters are even more common than those that dramatise their thoughts. They accompany explanations and illustrations in answer to questions and also occur in discussion and reflection about

moral themes like justice. Often, they exemplify the imagined attitudes of characters, as in this example in which Rachel discusses the character of Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Under scrutiny is his tendency to complain about circumstances and the actions of others, referring in particular to an episode in which Eustace is caught trying to steal water at night on board the ship when it was being rationed:

Eustace if he has something to complain about everybody has to know about it...he complains about the silliest of things and that...like *oh the water wasn't fair* and he felt really poorly but like everyone else might have felt poorly Caspian might have been really really poorly but we don't know...

(interview 24.6.03: 33 - 40).

The significance of Rachel's use of the word 'like' to introduce the voice of the character is a feature of many of the children's use of language, but seems to operate here to introduce an imaginary example. It also appears to indicate the beginning of role taking and that a likeness by identity is being suggested between the voice of the child and that of the character. In this sense, at least in this example, the voice could be said to become a metaphor for the attitude of the character (see for example Frye, 1964: 62 - 63).

## 8.4 Dialogues of thought and speech

### Imaginary witnesses

At times, responses to questions, reflection or discussion required one of the children to consider more than one character at a time. This will inevitably be the case in responding to narratives in which many characters play different parts. Many responses amongst the examples collected in this data set show the children constructing an imaginary dialogue between characters in the narrative. Sometimes, this dialogue mirrors in some way actual dialogue found in the text of the story – sometimes reconstructed, sometimes reshaped. At times, this dialogue is purely

imaginary and is constructed in order to explore the significance of many aspects of the moral dimension of the text, as well as to construct and call forth (along with the monologues described above) a series of what might be called imaginary witnesses to the moral world of the text. As such, dialogues of thought and speech also represent a specific kind of alternative narrative employed by children in trying to grasp the moral significance of the stories.

A dialogue about Eustace

A good example that displays many of these features comes from an interview with Darren about *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* in which he discusses Lucy's perspective on the disappearance of Eustace in chapter 6 of the story. To do so, he also summons up the voices and thoughts of other characters, both trying to reconstruct the text as well as to explain how Lucy's attitude differs from the rest of the ship's crew:

Lucy says *he may have got lost or fallen into a hole or been captured by savages* and Drinian butts in and says *or killed by wild beasts* [laughter]...he's thinking of being killed while Lucy's thinking...*he's still alive we can help this person we can still save Eustace* but then Drinian thinks *well he's gone he's must be dead by now* and like Rhince also says *and a good riddance if he has I say*...so he wants him dead and wants him out of his life for ever...

(interview 1.7.03: 440 - 448).

Here Darren recalls the reactions of both Drinian and Rhince – two of the ship's crew – from the text *verbatim*, as well as Lucy's initial supposition, but he supplies Lucy's thoughts about Eustace, that he could still be alive and therefore capable of being rescued. This dialogue, reshaped to reveal Lucy's thoughts and motives – to 'save' Eustace – is an inventive way to summarize contrasting attitudes and imaginatively extend the text to include the specific perspective of the more central character. By so doing Darren shows her to be, in his imagination, unwilling to abandon a difficult and burdensome companion merely out of convenience.

### Anticipating the story

Rachel takes a similar approach in anticipating what may happen after Eustace is transformed into a dragon. Anticipating is one of several broad features of children's responses to fiction identified by Benton (1992: 20) and in this example Rachel creates an alternative narrative in order to effect this. Within this, she creates another dialogue using a collective voice that is set against the imaginary voice of Eustace. None of her dialogue exists in the original text:

I think that he was saying about the first time he felt lonely...so people have kept him company...so when he went off he became all lonely and that ...so I'd like to see how he finds out he's a dragon whether he just walks along as normal or something and tries to go back and the others are like *keep away from me no no you* and get quite scared and try and sail away really quick or something...he's like *what?* and then look[s] down and say[s] *Oh I'm a dragon cool* or whether he'll get really angry and mardy and...<sup>3</sup>

(interview 24.6.03: 302 - 309).

### Summarising and contextualising

In this dialogue, Rachel creates two voices that dramatise the speech of characters in the story. In the first case she captures the anticipated fear of the ship's crew on seeing a dragon and in the second Eustace's possible emotional confusion at his own "dragoning". Both voices appear to help Rachel prepare for reading further in the text, giving her a scenario against which to test the original as it unfolds as well as summarising the divide between Eustace and the ship's crew – a very real feature of the text at the point she has reached. Once again, the voices create an emotional and intellectual context for future reading as well as an economic and personal shorthand for her current understanding.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Mardy' is a local dialect word for 'cross', 'moody' or 'angry'.

## 8.5 The use of imaginary and collective others

### Existential drama

Other ways in which children dramatise voices include the use of the singular and plural pronoun “you” (as in Rachel’s example above) or the collective “they” to introduce imaginary others. Quite a few other examples of the use of “you” to introduce an imaginary other can be found in the children’s interviews and small group discussions. Darren, discussing the consequences for the character of Eustace being turned into a dragon in Lewis’ *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* uses this strategy to introduce the thoughts of an imaginary ‘everyone’ on seeing a dragon:

...everyone's scared of a dragon like...if you see a dragon you think *the dragon damn he's going to try and burn me to death or hurt me...*  
(interview 1.7.03: 210 - 212).

Here, Darren uses an imaginary ‘you’ to explore the emotional response that might follow the sighting of a dragon – a significant event for the characters in the text itself. Instead of stating the potential fear and threat and the rising sense of panic (‘damn’) that might follow this, he imagines a reaction by summoning an imaginary other and placing himself in their position. In so doing, he gains immediacy, retains the narrative sense and emphasises the effect of Eustace’s transformation on others, from their perspective. Such narrative invention adds a certain existential drama to the facts that could be summarised in a propositional statement - such as “a dragon would make them (or me) panic from fear of death or harm”.

### The football match

In an earlier pair discussion with Simon, Darren used a similar approach in summoning an imaginary “you” to create an analogy concerning the honesty of Lord Bern in the same story. Approaching the Lone Islands by ship the Narnians deceive

the islanders (including Governor Gumpas) into thinking they are bringing a fleet of ships to the island. In fact they have only one – *The Dawn Treader* herself. Darren can't decide at first whether this is a good in itself or not so he uses the analogy of a promise made by another ('you') pledging their support at a football match then not turning up:

Simon	All Gumpas really wants is money most of the time as well
Darren	Money and power that's why like Lord Bern came across
Simon	So he's a bit like a gambler
Darren	Yeah he's like a gambler once you get hooked on
Simon	He's greedy
Darren	Yeah you get more and more and more
Simon	It's like "The Pardoner's Tale"
Darren	Yeah...but Lord Bern...lying's a deceitful thing like 'cause if you lie to someone it's like it's almost like betraying someone sort of saying like <i>I'm going to be there to help you and cheer you on</i> at a football match when they never come and they do summat else...so sort of you've gotta keep your promise but he did lie for a very good reason (pair discussion 16.6.03: 63 – 74).

As if defending Lord Bern he suggests 'he did lie for a very good reason' but not until considering, in terms familiar to himself and his audience Simon, the nature of deceit and betrayal. Saying one thing then doing another is a common enough occurrence and Darren's comparison is quite apt – promising support then withdrawing it being a parallel to Bern's "promising" a fleet then delivering a single ship. Using an imaginary voice, he gains immediacy, keeps the interest of his discussion partner and reveals understanding of the moral responsibility attendant upon leaders and friends. Lying, after all, is a good way to lose friends and make enemies.

'Ugh there's a dragon!'

Sometimes the children dramatise collective voices more explicitly to suggest the thoughts and reactions of a group, the reasons for a collective choice or action. In the same interview conversation with Darren about *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* referred to above concerning Eustace and the dragon, the collective thoughts of the rest of the



ship's crew are dramatised using the pronoun "they" to explain what is happening to Eustace after he has been transformed into a dragon in chapter 6. In the interview conversation, Darren had been exploring Eustace's isolation resulting from his transformation and went on to explore the reactions of the crew to Eustace's appearance, in the story, on the beach by *The Dawn Treader*.

Well he thought...being a dragon now...no one would want to be with him they'd all think *ugh there's a dragon let's go away* and like when the dragon landed on the beach all Caspian's men woke up and went to go and try to kill him...so they're like if he was just normally Eustace they wouldn't have attacked him but because he's the dragon they think *right he's going to endanger our people we got to kill him...*

(interview 1.7.03: 171 - 176).

#### Collective voices

Here Darren dramatises the fear and horror of the crew's reaction using the non-verbal sound 'Ugh' and then invents a process of thought by which they collectively decide to kill the dragon (Eustace) in order to protect themselves. The dramatisation here allows Darren to develop his understanding of why the ship's crew decide to attack the dragon – an event that never actually takes place. This is because they discover that the dragon is their companion Eustace. Once again, the moral dimension of the narrative becomes prominent in this response – imaginatively re-enacting the existential horror of the encounter, the motives that impel self-defence and the collective decision that accompanies this.

## 8.6 Dramatising the narrator and the reader

#### Chilling enchantment

When the narrator is recalled, or an imagined reader constructed in discussion, it is in connection with the emotional impact of the narrative - literature is *affective* (Ryken, 2002a: 29) - and powerfully so for the developing readers in this study. Rachel,

responding to the Grimm story *The Seven Ravens* recalls how the narrator describes the brothers after they have been transformed into ravens:

I thought it well...chilling...when they said like *the seven cold black ravens* it sounded quite nasty...evil...not a nice thing 'cause like black's not a happy colour is it...it's quite horrible...

(interview 1.4.03: 153 - 157).

Here the narrator's voice is conflated with the voice of the parents ('they') whose treatment of the brothers in this story – cursing them for tardiness and disobedience in fetching water so that they are magically changed into ravens - comes in for a good deal of discussion by Rachel and the other children. In fact, in the text, the ravens are described as 'coal-black' rather than 'cold black', an interesting substitution given the adjective Rachel uses to describe the emotional effect this has on her – 'chilling'.

#### Economy and detail

It is as if dramatising the narrative voice, along with the voice of the parents allows her to enter more fully into the emotional and dramatic impact of this moment in the story – to re-experience what is, in effect, the moral touchstone of the whole tale – an enchantment resulting from angry, impatient words that must be undone. Here is the Grimm version; having been sent by their father to fetch water and then having lost the water jug by vying to be first to fill it at the well for their sister's baptism, the seven sons fear to return home empty-handed:

As they still did not return, the father grew impatient, and said: 'They have certainly forgotten it while playing some game, the wicked boys!' He became afraid that the girl would have to die without being baptised, and in his anger cried: 'I wish the boys were all turned into ravens.' Hardly was the word spoken before he heard a whirring of wings over his head, looked up and saw seven coal-black ravens flying away. (Colum, 1997: 137)

'Chilled' by the enchantment and the ravens, Rachel's response also shows how the economy of moral touchstones can affect her – and how small details carry great

weight in children's imaginations. Because of its importance, I discuss the emotional dimension of the children's responses further in the next chapter.

Man overboard!

The reader, like the narrator here, is summoned in another of Rachel's responses to Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* to dramatise the emotional impact of a particular incident – this time a barely mentioned action in the narrative that, again, is the source of much discussion amongst the children. In chapter 5, *The Dawn Treader* sails through a fierce storm and is heavily damaged as a result. At one point the narrator states, almost in passing that 'one man was lost overboard' (Lewis, 1955: 57). The reader never learns who this man was and he is never mentioned again. The children, however, seemed to think this very unfair and made this small incident the subject of much discussion both with me and with each other. Rachel in discussion with Amy showed one aspect of her response to this by giving an imaginary reader's reaction, simply and succinctly after she invents an announcement about the sailor's death by dramatising the speech of someone ('they') on board ship:

...they...just said *oh he's gone overboard* and carried on with the story they could have been a little bit more caring I suppose...couldn't they? you know that he's gone over and you think *ahhh sad* but you just get on with it...  
(pair discussion 24.6.03: 117 - 119).

Perhaps the distance this affords allows her to put the incident in some sort of emotional perspective – '*sad*' – but the reading and the adventure must go on, side by side with the reader's responses.

## 8.7 Inserted voices and imaginary objects

### Justifying dishonesty

Sometimes in the children's responses, new voices appear in the narrative as if inserted from the child's own world. Some of the examples discussed above illustrate how new perspectives are introduced into children's discussions by the creation of voices. As an example that illustrates the use of an imaginary, inserted voice in which the child, quite consciously and deliberately considers a character's justification or reasons for acting the way they do, here is Darren responding again to *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. King Caspian, approaching the Lone Islands on *The Dawn Treader* deceives Governor Gumpas into thinking he is accompanied by a large fleet of ships when in fact *The Dawn Treader* is alone. This he does using a series of well-timed and faked signals to the other, fictitious ships to make Gumpas think a well-armed enemy is attacking him.

- Res.        How would you justify it if you were Caspian doing something dishonest ?
- Darren     I'd say like to my self right *I'm not actually doing something bad I'm actually helping quite a lot of people by lying...* usually if you lie you're doing something bad but if you do what he was doing if you actually did what he was doing in that case...lying...it's...a good thing...  
(interview 17.6.03: 179 - 185).

Darren imagines himself as Caspian considering the justification for his actions, but instead of merely entering the role, he distinguishes himself clearly from the character to explain what he considers might be the kind of reasoning involved in such a decision. This kind of intentional thinking is actually very common in the children's responses and here an "imagined self", as opposed to the imagined character is used to explore this aspect of decision-making, a feature so important to the process of moral choice and deliberation (Jaroszynski and Anderson, 2003: 29).

## The sorting hat

Sometimes, as is often the case in the world of fantasy or fairy tale literature, the boundaries between objects, people and other creatures are shifted or removed altogether. Objects and animals are often personified or given a voice and a life that can raise them to the status of moral agents or important determinants in the fate of protagonists. This is certainly so in the traditional fairy and folk tale literature, as well as in more recent fantasy stories like those by C. S. Lewis, J. K. Rowling and Phillip Pullman. Both Gareth and Holly are keen readers of the Harry Potter series, and in this response, Gareth dramatises the voice of the Hogwarts hat as it decides which house Harry will be in on his arrival at the School for Wizards:

Gareth	The hat chooses in your head like if you got a real evil mind it'll put you in Slytherin...if you're kind and cheerful it like put[s] you in one of the others
Res.	So does the hat know?
Gareth	Yeah...because when Harry put it on it was going <i>Slytherin Slytherin</i> like that... <i>no no no</i> [Laughter]

(interview 25.3.03: 134 - 142).

Harry does not want to be placed in Slytherin house, and is eventually placed in another house, Gryffindor. Gareth recreates a kind of dialogue between Harry's thoughts and the voice of the hat – either spoken aloud or inside Harry's mind. His laughter shows how much he enjoys recalling this incident, but also perhaps how much he is amused by the character's dilemma and will to resist being assigned a house he does not want. Again, this moment of inner drama in the narrative text is re-enacted, almost in shorthand with, for Gareth, the essence intact – the amusing and intriguing spectacle of a new boy at school at the mercy of a mysterious and apparently all-seeing object with the power to determine the future course of his school career.

## 8.8 Non-verbal imitations

### Dramatic boundaries

Sometimes, verbal dramatisation gives way to non-verbal expressions that are dramatised in similar re-enactments of the narrative. In this example from Gareth's dialogues about the Harry Potter books Sirius Black, Harry's godfather is trying to kill Wormtail (another wizard disguised as a rat called Scabbers) who is hiding with Ron Weasley in the Gryffindor dorm of Hogwarts Castle. There is a scuffle in the dorm at night when Sirius Black attacks Ron's bed and Gareth describes this conflict, a moral touchstone for him in the text:

Gareth	...apparently he can't get through but he has a couple of pages ago he was in Harry's like where he sleeps in the dormitory
Res.	He was trying to get Harry was he?
Gareth	Yeah and there were curtains and he actually got the wrong bed he got Ron's and there was all these knife marks and Ron woke up and he saw him there
Res.	Really, that sounds quite exciting part of the story
Gareth	And he goes <i>Urrr!</i>

(interview 25.3.03: 409 - 416).

Gareth's use of a character's voice here makes the drama of the conflict immediate and present to the discussion. It also provides a kind of marker that denotes the boundary to his interest in the moral touchstone of this incident. With the voice of Ron Weasley, he signals the end of his account, leaving it unresolved at its most dramatic moment. Assuming I would know the outcome, Gareth moved on after this to a further discussion of Harry's choices in the story. Like other examples of Gareth's, his sense of dramatic timing is admirable.

### Talking animals

Sometimes children's use of dramatisation is both well-timed and amusing. Endlessly playful, they create accents and modify their speech to suit the occasion and the character. In this example, Rachel is exploring the qualities of talking animals in

Narnia after reading the first few chapters of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. The context for her speech is a consideration of whether in fact being able to talk gives Reepicheep some sort of unfair advantage over others like Eustace (who might not expect it):

I think if Reepicheep was like a person he'd have a really squeaky voice like this [here Rachel makes her voice high and squeaky] I can't do it do you know what I mean I think it would be really squeaky and high I think he's quite a *wuhhay* person he's quite outgoing...

(pair discussion 16.6.03: 161 - 165).

Making her voice become very high-pitched and squeaky, Rachel imitates how she thinks Reepicheep, being a mouse, would speak. By introducing sound and tone into the voice, she takes herself one step closer to the character's perspective and at the same time finds great amusement in the task. Such strategies not only bring the story and characters alive for the children, but render it more meaningful, more significant and more intensely part of their own imaginative worlds. The amusement both girls gained from this discussion reminds us that, as for the other children, the affective soon leads to the moral domain and seems to act as some kind of indicator of the significance of events for the child.

## 8.9 The absence of dramatisation

### Detailed descriptions

All the children who responded to stories in this study used the dramatisation of voices related to the stories as a strategy of response. There were variations here, just as there were in children's uses of alternative narratives of which dramatisation is a sub-property. By providing detailed descriptions from the data of both strategies I hope to have provided the basis for some assertions or fuzzy generalizations about children's response to the moral dimension of fiction and the moral imagination

(Stake, 1995, Bassey, 1999, 2003). Clearly dramatisation is a common feature of these children's responses; Darren, Gareth and Rachel employ it often. For Anna, James and Holly it is less frequently apparent though still a strategy they all employ to differing degrees.

#### Stable concepts

It is possible that for some children, dramatisation occurs at the level of 'inner speech' in 'draft' or abbreviated form which they do not report because of the decrease in vocalisation that accompanies 'inner speech':

inner speech functions as a draft...in oral speech...Inner speech is speech almost without words...is to a large extent thinking in pure meanings...a dynamic, shifting, unstable thing, fluttering between word and thought. (Vygotsky, 1986: 144 - 149)

It may remain an inner phenomenon for the child in question, unamenable to the data collection methods I adopted. It is also possible that the semi-structured interview guide I devised was not sensitive enough for some children to reveal if this was the case. Participants in interviews do not always reveal themselves fully and sometimes only wish to present themselves in ways they perceive as positive in the interview context (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 179).

Children's dramatisation of voices however, like the creation of alternative narratives occurred in both interview and peer group sessions; this would suggest its stability as an analytic concept and as a strategy. The appearance of dramatisation in children's responses to and within their own narratives is also supported by other research findings such as those of Piaget (1932) mentioned in chapter 2 (e. g. Scrib and the story of the scissors: *ibid.* 228). More recently Maybin (2006: 76 - 78) has described how children in school use the dramatised, 'reported voices' of others to mediate,



represent and evaluate experience in mainly social contexts. The accompanying emotional force of direct speech appears to help children powerfully express their own positions and perspectives in similar ways to those in this study.

#### The link to comprehension

It is also possible that variations in children's comprehension levels disrupt the creation of dramatisation and alternative narratives simply because the child has not understood the narrative well enough to enter into character's perspectives. This suggests that although comprehension is extended and supported by dramatisation, both dramatisation and the creation of alternative narratives are to a degree dependent upon basic comprehension for their effectiveness. It would also suggest that both these strategies may be part of what Narvaez et. al. (1999: 484) consider 'something beyond general reading comprehension' necessary for moral comprehension of narrative and to which I referred in chapter 3.

Clearly, the role of the questions and the "situated" nature of this inquiry should be emphasised; all participants were children taught by the researcher who responded to questions designed to elicit responses to moral aspects of narrative and for whom discussion of texts in a classroom context was both familiar and encouraged. However, none of the questions or tasks directly invite dramatisation or the creation of alternative narratives. The children, however, do appear to use them as strategies for internalising meaning and significance and for presenting their responses and thoughts, an important point I discuss further in chapter 10. None of the questions precisely anticipate the kind of causal, inventive and metaphorical thinking characteristic of the responses here.

### Working hypotheses

By presenting a range of data from individual cases I have also attempted to show the variations in children's perspectives of the moral dimensions of story, their quite individual choices, concerns, emotions, explorations and evaluations of this aspect of narrative text. Such perspectives can help the validity of case study findings on the assumption that readers can extract a universal from a range of particulars so creating their own working hypotheses about - in this case - children's reading (Merriam, 1998: 209, Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 38). Case-to-case transfer is based on the notion of "fit" between one situation and another in which the concepts and ideas of one study can be transferred to another context, applied and discussed (Schofield, 1993: 221). The rich and imaginative perspectives of children, strategically involved in responding to the moral dimension of fiction ensure the presence of many voices. I invite readers to compare these with the dramatic enactments of children in schools, homes and other contexts where fiction is considered important or in some sense valuable to children's lives. Even Holly, for whom taking the perspectives of others is generally more difficult because of her autism, finds room for Harry's voice: she enthusiastically dramatises the difficulties of Quidditch in a conversation I had with her about the Harry Potter books:

*Harry likes it but I should be careful 'cause it's wicked fast and damn near impossible to see!*

(interview 21.3.03: 292 - 293).

## 8.10 Summary and conclusions

### Childhood perspectives

Listening to children dramatising the voices of characters and inventing alternative narratives in response to fiction is a reminder that adolescence is, or arguably should

still be, part of children's childhood. The children I worked with are only just beginning to move towards adult responsibility, some further along, some not so. Their childhoods are still very close and the predisposition of children to play finds its way, almost always without guile into their talk and response to fiction. As Vygotsky puts it,

*play gives a child a new form of desires.* It teaches her to desire by relating her desires to a fictitious 'I', to her role in the game and its rules. In this way a child's greatest achievements are possible in play, achievements that tomorrow will become her basic level of real action and morality. (Vygotsky, 1978: 100)

Imaginatively creating the unspoken dialogue of stories children very quickly adopt the perspectives of others, taking their voices and roles seemingly with ease (Coles, 1997: 25). Not all of them are so adept at this, as I have commented on above; however, dramatisation as an act of imagination appears to be a strategy children adopt to support them in making explanations, in drawing illustrations and in developing evaluations of the moral dimensions of fiction.

#### Narrative reasoning

As such it is a strategy which supports children's internalisation of the meaning and significance of moral aspects of narrative – in particular those related to causality and the connecting together of motive, action and consequence. This kind of narrative reasoning, based on empathetic understanding of others who will be affected by one's decisions is what constitutes much of real moral life (Vitz, 1990: 714). In a sense, then, the dramatisation described here could be seen as a kind of moral rehearsal for 'real life', its decisions, considerations of alternatives and consequences. It may also be linked in this way to the kind of empathetic engagement and the willingness of children 'to put themselves in the shoes of others, to experience that way their life' (Coles, 1997: 99).

### Illustrating moral propositions

As a sub-property of the wider strategy of creating alternative narratives, dramatisation consists of the creation of multiple voices in monologue and dialogue. Children generate characters' speech and thought going well beyond straightforward comprehension, though clearly at times a lack of basic story comprehension appears to limit how children use this strategy. Holly, for example often appeared to lack enough basic understanding to extend her responses in this way. Dramatisation also appears to possess the kind of economy that allows summarisation of characters' experiences, attitudes and stances towards the events and other characters. As such it is often an elegant and memorable way of communicating propositions about the text. Darren, for example communicates his understanding about lying and honesty in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* using a voice within an analogy drawn from his own experience of friendship. Such storying that I referred to in chapter 7 seems to be a strategy by which children offer imaginative perspectives and illustrations about moral propositions and positions; "Lying is a kind of betrayal" becomes a story, an alternative narrative or "analogue story" about lying to friends (Robinson and Hawpe, 1986).

### Meaningful and immediate contexts

Dramatising such voices also involves bringing imaginary witnesses to bear on moral issues in the text as in Darren and Rachel's discussions about Eustace's behaviour. These voices bring moral touchstones to life, re-enacting them as if to "test" them by putting characters - and each other - on "trial". Gender-switching is also a relatively common feature of this strategy as children enter the imaginary lives of characters not their own gender, once again showing their playfulness and the plasticity of their imaginations. Used in anticipation, such voices create personal and meaningful

contexts for future reading within the text as well as points of comparison to help them establish characters' moral credentials. Dramatising voices also appears to create immediacy for both children and their listeners; the use of present tenses helping this process (Maybin, 2006: 76). Dramatisation renders a wide range of textual elements meaningful, entertaining and memorable; as a strategy it also creates an emotional context for comprehension. Through character and other voices, children communicate emotion – a key aspect of their responses to the moral dimensions of stories that I consider in the next chapter.

## Chapter 9

### Claims on the affections: How children's emotions are engaged in moral response to fiction

*'Story: a compelling narration that by art and artifice engages our sentiments and makes us feel deeply about people, even those in circumstances that are utterly foreign to us.'*

Wilson (1994: 32)

#### 9.1 Introduction

The aesthetic dimension

A good story as I suggested earlier, has the potential to do more than engage children's thought and imagination; it offers dramatic perspectives on characters, actions and their consequences that also engage the emotions. In this chapter I consider the role of emotion in children's responses to the moral dimension of story and how important this is in engaging their imaginations and thoughts about character and action. While readers go to literature for many different reasons, enjoyment or pleasure is usually the main motivation (Ryken, 2002b: 137). Indeed, the aesthetic dimension to a story is intimately connected to the enjoyment that accompanies reading - for out of its beauty, a story may stir readers into affective responses that have the potential to influence them long afterwards. This is because our relations with the world around us and the way in which we make sense of experience are profoundly mediated by our emotions (Egan, 1992: 70):

*The *raison d'être* of the story is that we shall weep, or shudder, or laugh as we follow it. (Lewis, 1961: 66)*

Emotion and value

Emotions, it should be remembered, form part of a child's "interior sense" – the interior life that maintains contact with objects no longer present to the external

senses. Most importantly the role they play in our inner lives is different from mere “sense impressions” of objects but is associated with the experience of value:

...different objects which we encounter in our immediate sensory experience impinge on our attention not only as having content but as having value. A sense impression is a reaction to content, an emotion is a reaction to value...The ability to experience emotions which are at once profound and powerful seems to constitute a particularly important factor in the inner life. (Wojtyla, 1981: 103)

The emotions, with all their positive and negative colouring, also have some influence in determining the objective structure of people’s actions (Wojtyla, 1981: 32). To this extent, the emotional impact of story should not be underestimated, nor should the role of emotions in denoting the value of what children encounter during reading. Emotions are a powerful vehicle for the identification of value and as memories, may become resources for the child in future comprehension, reading response and moral action.

#### Creating attachments

Stories present us with “other worlds” of imagery and passion, worlds that have the ability to trouble us or haunt us, to enrapture and transport us or even to produce an intense and ecstatic delight that is near to what Lewis calls *sehnsucht* – longing and joy (Lewis, 1946: 467, 1947b: 90). Because of this, they also have the potential to create compelling memories that have lasting emotional force and influence over our actions:

A memory is, of course, a story, an aspect of experience that lives in a particular mind...a moment forceful enough, charged enough, to survive many other moments...Without such compelling memories, we are not ourselves, but rather anyone. A memory is an event endowed with the subjectivity of our imaginative life. (Coles, 1989: 183)

In this sense, imagination as that special combination of thought and emotion is powerfully implicated in the formation of identity, a point I argued in the previous chapter with reference to children's developing moral sense. In addition to this, the mimetic power of story also has the potential to provide children with opportunities to develop empathy, vicariously broadening their imaginative sympathies with the lives of others. In this way, stories may also help children create emotional attachments to goodness through character identifications, encouraging the formation of the "just sentiments" necessary for moral discernment (Lewis, 1943a: 15, Kilpatrick, 1994: 18).

#### Flashbulb memories

This in itself raises important questions about the role of the emotions in children's moral comprehension and response to story. Certain memories are known to be associated with very strong emotional responses – sometimes called 'flashbulb memories' (Kintsch, 1998: 420) - such that confidence in their recall is generally very high. If responding to the moral dimension of story can create these kinds of "flashbulb memories" this may create a vivid context in which children's comprehension is enabled and engaged. In addition, it may create the emotional context for the realisation of the kind of empathy that allows them to "see with other eyes". Memory, as St Augustine once remarked, relies on the retention of images often associated with strong emotions:

...even when I am unhappy I can remember times when I was cheerful, and when I am cheerful I can remember past unhappiness...[because] their images are present to my memory. (*Confessions* 1961: 220 - 221)



In the examples that follow, I provide evidence of this kind of engagement amongst children – the kind that may potentially lead to “flashbulb memories” that form the basis of deeper engagement with the moral dimension of fiction.

## 9.2 Identity, role-taking and rehearsal

### Developing identity

Children’s need to imitate and identify with others is an important factor in developing their growing sense of identity (Bohlin, 2005: 16). Stories, it could be argued, can have an important role to play in this by shaping patterns of emotional response, particularly in relation to the virtues. Aesthetic responses to story will require readers to pay attention to the affective aspects of their experience, a mixture of sensations, feelings, images and ideas that are evoked by reading. Because of this, responding to story can require children to bring their thinking to bear on their emotional reactions (Rosenblatt, 1938: 217). A story that has a dramatic or emotional impact on a reader can therefore have the potential to shape his or her response to both character and action.

### Role taking

Clearly, the pattern of emotions, passions or desires presented by narratives can vary enormously but it is the ability of narratives to present a range of roles as desirable or undesirable that is significant for children’s moral lives:

...readers who engage in a story, readers who enter the pattern of hopes, fears and expectations that every story asks for, will always take on ‘characters’...deciding whether a proffered new role, encountered in an appealing narrative, is one that [they] can afford to take on, or *ought* to take on. (Booth, 1988: 255 - 260)

Children readily take on such roles, as further examples below will show and the emotional engagement that this involves suggests the importance for them of this process. The emotions are important for morality because of their connection with the will and the powerful influence they can have on decisions. If well-ordered, they can make moral goodness more attractive and easier; if uncontrolled and chaotic they can make it unattractive and difficult to attain (Kreeft, 2001: 180). In essence, the emotions can move a person towards the good, acting from within the “heart” in influencing the will.

#### Rehearsing good and evil

Stories, as I have suggested, have an important place in providing children with information about roles, expectations and patterns of behaviour (Robinson and Hawpe, 1986). In entering into these patterns, children practice or rehearse and learn how goodness is expressed and how the conflicting nature of good and evil are played out in imaginary worlds of fear, longing or delight. In responding aesthetically to stories, their emotions become involved in such conflicts, attaching themselves to various roles and voices that provide a potential training ground for the rehearsal of moral choice and the education of virtue (Guroian, 1998: 20, 38). Of particular importance to this process is how the children in the inquiry build a sense of empathy and identification, putting themselves into the roles of characters and imagining how they would feel.

### **9.3 Building empathy and identification by dramatising roles**

#### A range of strategies

Children’s own feelings about the characters and incidents in the stories to which they responded are quite varied across both text and situation. Often these are related to

the perceived attitudes of the characters in the stories and also to the children's own attitudes towards character or incident. The children use several strategies in order to explore their emotional responses and to articulate their perceptions about attitude and emotion. For example, conditional structures that employ modal verb constructions like "would have" or "would have been" are fairly frequent as are the use of the word "like" to introduce examples of dramatised voices or role-playing. They also employ a fairly wide range of their idiosyncratic vocabulary and expressions to suggest emotional reactions or character voices. These range for example, from "really freaky" to suggest surprise or wonder at the abnormality of J. K. Rowling's imaginary creatures to feeling "sorry for" the treatment of Governor Gumpas in Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

A sack of gold

An interesting example comes from the conversation referred to earlier (see chapters 6 and 8) between Darren and Simon in which they discuss the relative virtues of Lord Bern and Governor Gumpas from *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

Darren	Um Gumpas... he didn't care about the safety of his men or anything
Simon	All he cares about is himself
Darren	Yeah selfish...like if someone offered him what would he rather have a big sack of gold or well good armour...well trained men like get 'em all trained up better swords and shields...I'd say he'd have chosen the gold...'cause he thinks <i>right I don't care about the men if they can fight that's alright right I don't give a damn about them</i>
Simon	It's like <i>if they die in the wars I'll just get more</i>
Darren	Yeah <i>if they die in the wars I'll just get more men I'll just get some of the slaves from the slave trader...but with Lord Bern and Caspian they think well I want my men to be the best I want them to get all the right stuff and everything I don't want them just to have shabby clothes and like bad armour I want to keep make sure their health's as good as mine yeah</i>

(pair discussion 16.6.03: 77 - 90).

This dialogue, composed of a combination of the imaginary thoughts of Governor Gumpas and the contrasting and yet collective thoughts of Lord Bern and King

Caspian seems to have been constructed from recollections of chapter 4. Here Caspian and Bern enter Gumpas' castle with the purpose of surprising and then expelling him from his office as Governor of the Lone Islands. Neither characters' thoughts are described in the text, though as Caspian and Bern enter the castle, the narrator observes that the 'armour' of Gumpas' 'guards...was in a disgraceful condition'. Caspian himself also comments on this when facing the guards in the castle courtyard saying 'I should have something to say about the state of your men's armour and weapons', his own men's armour having previously been described as having 'shone...so that one could hardly look at it steadily' (Lewis, 1955: 44ff).

#### Emotive dialogue

Drawing on these features of the narrative, the children's invented dialogue explores the contrasting motives and intentions of the characters as a means of ascribing them moral status within the world of the story. The use of emotive phrases like '*don't care*' and '*don't give a damn*' reinforce the emotional tone of the drama suggesting Gumpas' selfishness. This exchange of perspectives along with the invention of a 'sack of gold' perhaps helps them with this process. Earlier in this dialogue, to which I referred in chapter 7, Simon had compared Gumpas' greed to the tale of the Pardoner in Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, a text his class had studied previously with me. As an interesting piece of intertextuality, the 'sack of gold' may be transferred directly from this story.

Darren's appropriation or invention of the gold concretises Gumpas' greed and selfishness and allows the dialogue to proceed on the basis of an imaginary choice that is, in reality, reflected in the 'state' of the 'men's armour and weapons' in the text. These kinds of imaginary scenarios or alternative narratives also provide opportunities

for the rehearsal of perspectives and the development of information in relation to roles either missing from, or incompletely provided by the original narrative (Robinson and Hawpe, 1986: 122).

## 9.4 Responding to roles and practicing character

The pleasures of laughter

Responses that suggest humour and laughter also give a good indication of the power of some stories to influence the children's emotions and to shape their responses. Gareth, for example, also found it humorous to put himself into the place of the girl in *The Seven Ravens* and imagine himself taking a television with him instead of or as well as the ring, bread, water and chair, '...it's a bit humoristic but...I'd have taken a little 'TV just in case I got bored' (interview 28.3.03: 249 - 50). He also found it amusing to imagine tripping up the evil Draco Malfoy from the *Harry Potter* series to pay him back for his 'being mean to everyone':

he's always like being mean to everyone else and you think *that's not very nice...* I always think *say somebody trip[ped] you up...* you always think [laughter]...then you see...say trip over something like a twig or something you would start laughing that's what I'd do

(interview 25.3.03,: 315 - 320).

The two voices here are interesting. The first seems to be Gareth the reader responding to Malfoy's actions, followed by Gareth the reader again inserting himself into the story and addressing Malfoy. The imaginary episode of Malfoy and the twig is Gareth's own invention, an alternative narrative that "corrects" or modifies the original narrative according to Gareth's own tastes. His amusement stems from imagining Malfoy's just deserts, showing that Gareth is attached to the idea of defeating Malfoy - one of the representatives of evil in the story - and experiences some pleasure at the idea. This is consistent with the notion that emotions can help

us move toward or away from goodness in attaching us to objects of good or evil, such as the character of Draco Malfoy (Jaroszynski and Anderson, 2003: 67).

#### A slap in the face

Sometimes however, the children express their emotions towards imaginary objects or incidents in unexpected ways suggesting that certain images can evoke unpredictable responses,

James	...where Maskew slapped Mr Glennie that was a bit funny...it's funny how he just goes up to him and slaps him...he uses a fish
Res.	So what's funny about it for you?
James	It's just something you wouldn't really do he just goes up to him and slaps him

(interview 24.5.04: 248 - 257).

This incident in *Moonfleet* did evoke some laughter in the classroom as well, though the question has to be asked as to whether this is in fact an “ordinate” response (Lewis, 1943a). Maskew deliberately insults the teacher and pastor Glennie in front of a class of children, revealing his pride and arrogance. It is a surprising incident, as James remarks and the surprise is perhaps what evokes the laughter. In another sense, responses towards Maskew could have been different – indignation perhaps, or disbelief. But laughter can hide these kinds of emotions, especially with children who may be less able or willing to communicate and articulate their feelings if, for example, they are with their teacher. In his later dialogue with Chris (19.5.04), however, James also referred to this incident as ‘unfair’ towards Glennie, revealing another side to his response, perhaps more consistent with the notion of “ordinate responses” to good and evil.

#### Violating the body

There were many other strong emotional responses to moral touchstones in the stories throughout the children’s dialogues. The incident in which the girl chops off

her finger in *The Seven Ravens* evoked strong reactions in dialogue, as well as in the classroom. Rachel, for example said that this incident ‘really made me feel sick because I don't know...I don't know why she had to chop off her finger anyway’ (interview 1.4.03: 124 - 127). Bemused why she had to resort to such drastic action, Gareth also suggested that other readers might respond this way ‘where she's chopped off her finger...people think it's pretty gruesome and people would say it was cool...like disgusting’ (interview 28.3.03: 44 - 54). Gareth however, clearly understands why she did so - because she had lost the magic stick given to her in the story. Holly however, economical in her response merely offered ‘yuk’ at the memory of this incident (interview 31.3.03: 306). The revulsion at self-mutilation, even though it leads to the freeing of the girl's brothers was common amongst the children, suggesting a basic awareness of the integrity of the human body and that its violation is in some sense abhorrent, even if for a “good cause” (*Evangelium Vitae*, 1995: 537).

#### The mercy of Aslan

In fact, surprise and shock were common ingredients of many responses. Darren's response to Aslan's treatment of Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is a good example:

I think he treated him like one of his own family helping him and everything like...I was very shocked I thought he'd have been like sentenced him to something or told him to go away and never come back...I thought he'd have been shouting at him for accusing everyone then start saying *now look what's happen to you look what you've done to all these people now how do you feel about it?*...I was surprised that he actually started to help him after he'd done all that horrible things to the sailors and everyone...and like I thought *I can't do be bothered to do this well 'cause I'm just going to leave them on their own*

(interview 1.7.03: 99 - 117).

In the story, Aslan restores Eustace from his state as a dragon by using his claws to tear off Eustace's dragon skin and having him bathe in a well amongst fruit trees on top of a mountain. Aside from the allegorical significance of this scene (Hooper,

1996: 423), Darren's responses to it are quite revealing. Imagining Eustace would be 'sentenced' or punished, he is 'very shocked' at Eustace's treatment – his complete restoration to his friends.

Expecting 'shouting', he encounters the mercy of Aslan helping Eustace even after all the wrong he has done to others. Summoning Aslan's voice, his alternative narratives explore what he had expected to happen and provide a comparison with the story itself. They also provide a means for him to explore the identity of Aslan, a character who challenges his expectations about justice and mercy. In dramatising Aslan's voice, he relies perhaps on his prior knowledge of how wrong-doing is dealt with – by punishment, not mercy – and uses his imagination to supply information not given about Aslan's thoughts in the text. He also explores role expectations, perhaps revealing his own to be without precedent for a character like Aslan (Robinson and Hawpe, 1986: 122).

A skeleton in the woods

A similarly strong response was evoked by Alice Walker's story *The Flowers* in dialogue between Gareth and Ryan. Gareth, with some characteristic drama imagines himself as Myop the main character getting her foot stuck in the 'broken ridge of the brow and nose' of a skeleton in the woods (Walker, 2001: 31),

because her foot got lodged in the eye socket then she couldn't free herself but she did and then she gave a yelp of surprise *yaah* just like that  
(pair discussion 10.4.03: 36 - 38).

This was delivered in a fairly high-pitched voice in imitation of a scream made by the girl Myop as she steps on the remains of the skeleton of the dead man in the woods - another example of the non-verbal imitation I described in chapter 8. The girl's 'yelp of surprise', although suggested, is not given in the text. It appears, as elsewhere, to



allow Gareth to take Myop's part, identifying himself with her momentarily as she sees the dead man.

#### Storied selves

It also suggests the strength of her reaction, and Gareth's engagement with the story. Dramatisation helps re-enact the story during the boys' discussion which turns quickly to the shock they might experience finding such a skeleton (described by them as 'weird' and 'freakier') and to the advisability of being out alone in the woods. As an imitation of events, Gareth's response is spontaneous and dramatic, the kind in which it becomes impossible (albeit momentarily) to draw a line between,

...some conception of a 'natural' storied self, and what we have become as we have first enjoyed, then imitated, then criticized...stories and our responses to them. (Booth, 1988: 229)

So life imitates art providing endless opportunities to practice or rehearse character. For Gareth, as for the other children, the affective soon leads to the moral domain and seems to act as one kind of indicator of the significance of events for the children.

#### Lawbreakers

James also experienced surprise and shock in his responses to *Moonfleet*. Like Darren, his expectations about character were challenged by the smugglers in the story who are law-breakers but act kindly towards John Trenchard, the hero. Surprised by their goodness, James comments,

...they seem like good people...they're good to John but not exactly good in the law kind of thing...[smuggling's] not good because it's breaking the law kind of...but they're still like nice people to John...kind to him...like Elzevir gave him a home

(interview 24.5.04: 259 - 274).

Anna, unlike James was not so much surprised by the smugglers in the story, but ‘puzzled’ by some of the other actions suggesting that the reading process has that constructive element by which clues need piecing together to solve a kind of “puzzle”:

Elzevir...he did something peculiar after the flood which puzzled me...when he was listening with Ratsey against the wall it puzzled me  
(interview 17.5.04: 74 - 78).

### 9.5 Approval and disapproval: Negotiating claims on the affections

Scared of heights

In almost all of the children’s responses, moral touchstones were associated with strong emotions. Often these were couched in terms of whether children approved or disapproved of the touchstone whether it was a character, an action or an event-sequence. Darren, like the other children, showed strong emotional reactions to many moral touchstones in Lewis’ *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. For example, when Eustace stumbles upon the dragon’s cave in chapters 5 and 6, Darren recognises the danger Eustace is in, identifying with his predicament in dialogue with Simon:

He was also in danger when he slid down that big massive slope and then ended up on the valley you wouldn't get me up there no matter what I'd just be too I'd be petrified I'm scared of heights...definitely scared...scared of fast stuff and all...[I] fell on the waltzers when I was six  
(pair discussion 25.6.03: 120 - 125).

Darren’s memory comes into play here as he remembers falling at a fairground when he was just six years old and how he is now ‘scared’ of heights. It seems that this is a role that Darren would not like – ‘petrified’ is a forceful word – helping him reject the idea of acting Eustace’s part here.

### Negative identifications

Such negative identifications that engage emotions such as fear remind us that moral choices are influenced by our emotions; they can be guided by what we are attracted to or by what we fear. Desire plays a part in creating the conditions upon which we make decisions, shaping them according to our attachments or desire for goodness, and therefore according to what we consider to be conducive to happiness (Booth, 1988: 201ff, Jaroszynski and Anderson, 2003: 33ff, Bohlin, 2005: 18ff). For Darren, this would not consist in scaling the heights of the hills in the story!

### Disapproval, sarcasm and contempt

Strong disapproval of characters or their actions is also frequent in the children's responses to moral touchstones of character, again suggesting the place of emotion in helping the child become attached to good or evil. For example, Holly strongly disapproved of the way in which Voldemort kills Harry's parents in the *Harry Potter* series:

Well that horrible man had a horrible voice and he's got a lot of scars on his face...I just hate the way he killed Harry's parents for no reason he killed Lizzie and James

(interview 21.3.03: 176 - 183).

She also strongly disapproved of the way Ron treats Hermione in the same stories:

...I think that's pretty nasty just because Hermione's so clever...doesn't mean he has to be so nasty to her we're all clever in different ways it's not nice at all

(interview 21.3.03: 246 - 256).

Sometimes this kind of disapproval becomes sarcastic contempt. In her reading journal (10.6.03) Rachel describes Eustace from *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* as 'boring' because of his continual complaints. Later in dialogue with Amy she imitates the complaining Eustace, showing her contempt for his wheedling attitudes:

Rachel	...Eustace suffers so much pain doesn't?...he he's so poorly he had to even try and steal some water he felt that poorly not [heavy sarcasm and emphasis]
Amy	They were all really all in pain weren't they?
Rachel	Yeah they were all but Eustace is the only one that is complaining about it everyone else just gets on with it...for all we know Caspian could die tomorrow

(pair discussion 24.6.03: 133 - 137).

#### Eustace and the spider

Eustace doesn't fare much better with Darren and Simon who castigate his cowardice during the storm:

Darren	Chicken he's just such a chicken he's lazy
Simon	He doesn't show that he's brave or anything he's not even brave anyway
Darren	No while all the sailors are up there he's writing in his diary
Simon	He's like if he sees a spider he [Simon howls here]...or something like that
Darren	He would just run away...

(pair discussion 25.6.03: 74 - 82).

Writing his diary while the storm is in full spate, Eustace complains about the lack of “proper” meals and about feeling unwell, not lifting a finger himself to help the boat through the crisis. Not surprisingly, Darren and Simon considered this ‘chicken’ and ‘lazy’. Simon even invents an alternative narrative in which Eustace is scared of a spider to supply additional evidence of his cowardice, dramatically acting out Eustace’s imaginary fears.

#### Choosing sides

Maskew comes in for some similarly scathing mockery from Anna who disapproves strongly of his behaviour in the village of Moonfleet in the novel. At several points early on in the narrative, Maskew’s presence in the village of Moonfleet is the subject of authorial comment, especially in chapter 8 after the auction of the ‘Why Not?’ Inn. Anna’s commentary about this is interesting, showing her contempt for Maskew’s whole personality, a judgement supported by some dramatic gestures and language,

I thought Maskew should have thought about it because if he was any considerate person I would have thought if I had chuck Elzevir out *where would he go what will he do?* but to me he just didn't he just ignored it and started betting and never thought of it...he goes walking prancing round the street with his nose held high...which I found pretty well amusing but yet shocking at the same time 'cause I wouldn't think of going around like that...even though he's rich he doesn't have to go prancing round to show it...he could just walk round normally in his posh clothes or something

(interview 17.5.04: 95 - 112).

Her evaluation of Maskew's behaviour is a mixture of shock and amusement but again is supported by her own alternative narrative about his thoughts had she been Maskew and his "high and mighty" behaviour suggested by the angle of his nose! Once again, the dramatic imitation of character suggests a kind of practice or role-playing; this time 'correcting' Maskew's behaviour with her own thoughtfulness about Elzevir, recently evicted from his inn, the 'Why Not?'. In this way, she sets her allegiance firmly within the Elzevir camp, connecting herself vicariously to the fortunes of another.

Expressing sympathy and compassion

Disapproval of different kinds of behaviour like this forms part of an evaluative approach that sometimes includes more direct expressions of sympathy and compassion. The word "sympathy" actually means "experiencing together" and so sympathy is something that unites people:

Sympathy...means above all that which 'happens' between people in the realm of their emotions – that by means of which emotional and affective experiences unite people. (Wojtyła, 1981: 89)

James, like Anna, was touched by the same episode in *Moonfleet*:

When Elzevir lost the "Why Not"...just felt like...I just thought he should've kept going...kind of sad for him 'cause he wouldn't have any home...'cause he'd been living there for generations

(interview 24.5.04: 279 - 286).

Sometimes however, to attain more direct expressions of compassion or pity some kind of identification is needed or expressed by the children. As a kind of metaphor of identity (Frye, 1964: 32), dramatisation can serve this purpose supporting the development of the necessary empathy that can accompany sympathetic understanding. Discussing the treatment of Gumpas by Lord Bern and the sailors in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* for example, Rachel and Amy consider how Gumpas could have been helped by creating an alternative narrative that includes the collective voices of Lord Bern's men:

Rachel ...I mean so I think that probably was quite nasty really they could have said *oh come and help me* or whatever something like that

Amy They could have gave him another chance...

(pair discussion 16.6.03: 340 - 342).

### Claims on the affections

By identifying themselves in these ways with characters in narratives, children reach emotional conclusions about them that support their evaluations of characters' relative worth or otherwise. Story, it could be argued, can provide many such opportunities by which children can experience imaginary claims on their affections. They can also provide, I would suggest, competing claims about normativity and permanence to which children can respond (Booth, 1988: 142ff, Guroian, 1998: 38). Rachel, for example was distressed about the experience of Reepicheep and other characters in being captured for the slave trade in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*:

...Reepicheep I feel quite sorry for her [sic] because I'd be really scared because you've been with them for quite a while and you don't know what's going on you'd I'd get really quite worried because I like...be really horrible not knowing what's going to happen to you and turn round tomorrow you've found you're somewhere else working for someone I think it'd really [be] quite unfair because they really haven't actually done anything wrong

(pair discussion 16.6.03: 104 - 113).

### Images of normativity

Imagining their situation, she feels 'sorry for' Reepicheep and the others by identifying with a situation not her own. By late childhood, empathy as an affective state more appropriate to the situation of another is usually accompanied by images of the other person in various distressful situations (Hoffman, 1984: 286). These images, as here encourage Rachel to respond to a situation in the world of the narrative and in her own world that is neither normative nor permanent, making it possible for her to compare her own experience to that of the imaginary actors in Lewis' drama. This in turn may help such children strengthen their understanding of what is normative – in this case, the nature of friendship and love.

### Disapproval of injustice

Disapproval of the behaviour of characters on the other hand suggests a well developed sense of what is "approved" by the child. Gareth, in another example clearly disapproved of Kino's actions in beating his wife in *The Pearl*:

...hitting his wife that's not really the right thing to do...but even though she did try and throw it in the sea it's not the right thing to do...he should have let Juana throw it back in the sea because she could see all the evil it was bringing to the family but I think he could see it but he just wouldn't let it get to him  
(interview 10.11.03: 162 - 167; 245 - 246).

In a similar way, Gareth clearly disapproved of the doctor's actions in the story:

...racist wasn't he yeah 'cause...these...like poor were living in brush houses near the sea and like he was living in a big house...he wouldn't treat them because of their race and stuff...nobody would give them a job or anything like that  
(interview 10.11.03: 172 - 179).

Gareth considered there was 'no point' in treating people this way, because 'everybody's equal' (180 - 181). The charge of racism however, clearly shows his disapproval and suggests Gareth's own sense of justice.

### Vicarious anger

Anger is another emotion that sometimes surfaces in the children's dialogues. Usually this is directed at specific kinds of behaviour and sometimes at the situations in which characters find themselves. Like the examples above, it is usually accompanied by some kind of consideration of the character's viewpoint or perspective. In dialogue together, Rachel, Holly and Gareth were unimpressed with the actions of the girl's parents in *The Seven Ravens* in withholding the knowledge about her seven brothers from her:

Gareth	It's...bad that the parents didn't tell her that she had seven brothers
Rachel	Yes which wasn't very nice
Gareth	If I were her I [would] want to know I had seven brothers or seven sisters
Rachel	I think I would as well
Gareth	One or two wouldn't be so bad but seven
Rachel	I think I would be quite angry personally
Holly	I think seven brothers and sisters
Gareth	Was quite a lot isn't it?

(group discussion 26.3.03: 76 - 83).

Imagining herself in the girl's place, Rachel expresses her imagined or vicarious anger directly and simply; in another example she explains how 'miffed' she would be in Gumpas' place finding out he was under attack from the Narnian Lords in chapter 4 of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

I'd be miffed...it was a right surprise...they could be like the best army in the world but they haven't had [a] chance to prepare...I think you should have to give them notice 'cause it's really unfair I know I'd be a bit miffed if suddenly I turned around tomorrow and I...found out I had to fight a war...I think I'd be a bit miffed for some strange reason

(pair discussion 16.6.03: 87 - 92).

### Bearing with others

Taking the place of others, empathising with their trials, sufferings and tribulations is accomplished here by a simple substitution of Rachel for Gumpas. By inventing voices however, as the many examples above show, this kind of empathy and



identification becomes more complete even if only momentary and vicarious. Anna also found occasion more than once to take the part of others and here she imagines the feelings of John's Aunt Jane had she known he was trapped in the vault in the early part of *Moonfleet*:

...well the way she's reacted so far she's kicked him out so...if she...knew the truth she'd be like *oh no no I can't bear him going down in there*  
(interview 17.5.04: 139 - 143).

Taking Aunt Jane's part by inventing her reaction in the form of an alternative narrative, Anna engages with this character's ordeal, feeling a difficulty not her own and for a moment bearing *with* a fictional other.

## 9.6 Artless engagement and moral transformation

Transforming vision

Moral transformation, if it is to be meaningfully achieved needs to take place alongside a transformation of vision – the kind of vision that stories themselves can provide (Kilpatrick, 1992: 134). Because literature is affective (Ryken, 2002a: 29), children's emotions are directly implicated in such a process – emotions such as those of Anna that approve, disapprove and attach themselves generously to the imagined worlds of character and moral choice. Sometimes, these attachments seem to prompt the desire for moral improvement, as here where Rachel reflects on how she would like to be more like the girl in *The Seven Ravens*:

Well being like not very nice at home...I think it would be a change to be like quite in a way a nice character...and do something nice to someone 'cause I like rescuing the brothers and that...  
(interview 1.4.03: 348 - 350).

Because stories show us what life feels like from the perspectives of others, they can provide important opportunities for children to take the perspective of others. In this

way, they can also reveal something of what connects us to others quite different or in different circumstances from ourselves.

The artlessness of children's games

In this sense, literary art is playful and it is this ludic quality to the imagination that makes it possible for children to enter the imaginary worlds of others so artlessly, as if it were a game:

Res.	Which character would you like to have been?
James	John...I wouldn't like my foot to have been broke though...I like playing stuff when you hide from people that's like what he's doing...just getting away from them and stuff...hiding...things like that (interview 24.5.04: 314 - 324).

James's analogy is very apt. By engaging their emotions, stories offer children continual opportunities for imaginative identifications that establish affinities between self and other (Iser, 1974: 291). Such enlargements of experience are central to the meaningful moral and imaginative development of the child and to helping children to practice or rehearse ways of seeing that are not habitually their own. They accompany the adventure of being able to 'see what [others] see, to occupy, for a while, their seat in the great theatre...' (Lewis, 1961: 139).

## **9.7 The absence of emotion, empathy and identification**

Making connections

In general terms, all the children responded to some aspects of the stories by making empathetic and emotional connections with moral touchstones in the text. This was evident directly through the use of dramatisation or indirectly by reconstruction of the original text into alternative narratives. Directly emotional responses like the examples in this chapter were rich and relatively frequent, a feature of 'constructively responsive reading' suggested by Pressley and Afflerbach (1995: 101). Once again,

however, variations exist between the individual children. Holly, for example was frequently emotive in her responses – a fact perhaps consistent with her own emphasis on the importance of the “heart” in responding to moral touchstones. James however, was more guarded in expressing his emotions in dialogue with me; in conversation with Chris however, he seemed more willing to express his feelings about character and plot through laughter and the kind of dramatic games and gestures I have previously suggested that he enjoyed.

#### Emotions and moral experience

Both Gareth and Rachel showed clearly which moral touchstones affected them quite directly and both were able to move between their own engagement and that of hypothetical readers to moral touchstones in the text. This suggests an ability to imagine how others would feel or respond both within the world of the text and outside of it. Like Anna and Darren, they were by degrees shocked, amazed, puzzled, disgusted and even chilled by incident and character providing a rich emotional commentary on their own reactions and on the significance of the moral dimension of the stories to them. If emotions have an important role in mediating how children make sense of experience (Egan, 1992: 70), then clearly the clarification of emotional responses should have a significant place in helping children to understand moral experience. Where such clarification is lacking, it may be that children could find it harder to make sense of both vicarious moral experience and their own.

#### Evidence of choosing sides

Certainly the degree of emotional engagement and empathy shown by individual children in responding to the stories varies; Natalie, who only came to one session at lunchtime showed no evidence of emotional engagement, nor of empathy with characters. It would be tempting to explain her troublesome behaviour at school in

terms of this apparent inability to take the perspective of the other, or to engage emotionally with the lives of others, albeit vicariously. However, the evidence is too scant to warrant such a conclusion; what is clear is that there is a relationship between emotional engagement with story, its absence and the comprehension of and involvement with characters and their imaginary worlds of behaviour, moral choice and virtue. If any relationship could be hypothesised, it would be that concerning the approval and disapproval of characters' behaviour, including their moral choices.

The appearance of good and evil

The question of “choosing sides” is suggested by Gareth himself in responding to an incident in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, one of the Harry Potter books:

Gareth     ...the night before the Quidditch final...he was woken and looked out the window...he went to get some water and he saw what looked like a black dog walking across the pitch...and he was like *that's the Grim* and then he sees Hermione's cat next to it like and I was think[ing] is this cat on the Grim's side...?

Res.        ...you seem quite interested in the idea of sides...has Harry got a side?

Gareth     ...yeah like the good side

(interview 25.3.03: 557 - 573).

In Harry's world, a Grim is an evil omen, a harbinger of death and Gareth records the question he asked himself when reading as to which 'side' the cat is on – life or death, good or evil? Interestingly, he also dramatises Harry's perspective, looking with him out of the window of Hogwarts' castle, engaged in discerning between reality and illusion, and between the appearance of good and evil.

The context for comprehension and empathy

It is possible however, as Natalie demonstrates, to “opt out” of this process, or even like Darren to maintain multiple perspectives, at least for a while. In fiction - unlike in life - we are not forced to choose. It could be argued however, that such affective stances can go with them into the world, forming the basis of memories and shaping

their view of reality (Coles, 1989: 127 - 129). Because of this, the absence of engagement itself is a choice but where life forces us to choose, fiction allows rehearsal of roles and perspectives outside of children's everyday experience. An important question that this raises is how far such emotional engagement enables comprehension of the moral dimension of story or is merely the context in which children realise the empathy that allows them to "see with other eyes". It should be clear from the evidence of this chapter that children's emotional engagement is part of a wider process that allows both more deeply engaged comprehension and the vicarious realisation of the "perspectives of others".

## **9.8 Summary and conclusions**

### *Affinities with others*

In this chapter I have argued for the aesthetic power of stories to influence children emotionally by the dramatic perspectives they offer on fictional lives. I have also argued that children's emotional responses and engagement with story are a context for the moral imagination, for depth of comprehension and for the realisation of empathy. Enjoyment and delight lead children quite naturally to shape patterns of emotional response to roles they encounter in fiction so endorsing or rejecting the choices they seem to suggest (Booth, 1988: 257ff). By attaching themselves in imagination to such roles and dramatising their perspectives they rehearse and imitate what it means to make such choices. Such emotional and empathetic identifications create affinities between children and others (Iser, 1974) supporting children's evaluations of the relative worth of character, moral choice and virtue.

### Attachments to good and evil

Such claims on their affections can vary considerably between surprise, shock or disgust and delighted wonder or approval. Indeed, the strength of children's emotional engagement with moral touchstones in the text suggests the degree to which such characters or incidents may be significant to individual children. Where imagination mediates how children make sense of their experience, responding to the moral dimension of story has the potential to create lasting and compelling memories that survive beyond the confines of the reading experience, shaping the child's view of the world (Coles, 1989, Egan, 1992). In this sense, the imagination becomes implicated in the formation of children's identity and the nurturing of sympathy for the lives of others by creating potential attachments to goodness and ordinate responses to good and evil (Lewis, 1943a, Kilpatrick, 1992). This is because the emotions can help us move toward or away from the good, guiding what we are attracted to or fear (Jaroszynski and Anderson, 2003: 67).

### The role of "authoritative communities"

The adventure of "seeing what others see" is part of the attraction of reading and children can develop rich commentaries on the emotional significance of such empathy. Where there are competing claims for their affections, notions of normativity and permanence need the reinforcement of teachers, parents or other members of such "authoritative communities" that can train children's emotions. Part of this process I would suggest involves supporting children's explorations and evaluations of character, virtue and moral choice by encouraging the expression and clarification of emotional response and empathy (Rosenblatt, 1938: 217, 224). Such emotions, it could be argued, can lead to the desire for moral transformation, for the realisation of imagined identities within a drama of good and evil:

The best motivation for acting well – and hence the surest foundation for morality – is the belief that we have a role to play in life...Morality is not a matter of rule-keeping but of role-playing...and in this context, acting your part well [is] understood not in the sense of pretending to be someone you [are] not but in the sense of rising above yourself. (Kilpatrick, 1992: 197)

This dramatic sense of life, so prevalent in the children's responses to the moral dimension of fiction is the basis for what I have called moral rehearsal, the subject of the next chapter.

## Part 4:

### A context for moral rehearsal

‘in the lives of fictional characters...students...can rehearse how they will respond to stress and leisure, build relationships, and deal with pleasure and pain. They can...rehearse how they might choose differently.’

(Bohlin 2005: 37)



## Chapter 10

### Moral rehearsal: A mode of children's response to fiction

'The stories we offer our children can help them shape their sense of identity, help them find a home in the world.'

Watkins (1992: 194)

#### 10.1 Introduction

A phenomenological interpretation

It is time now to summarize and integrate the implications of the material of the preceding chapters in order to prepare an interpretation of the main findings. This interpretation, consistent with what has essentially been a personalist study of children's responses to fiction will be primarily phenomenological in nature and scope. To carry out such an interpretation I will draw on important ideas from Karol Wojtyła's phenomenology of the person (Wojtyła, 1976, 1979, 1981), as well as from theorists I have previously cited such as Iser (1974, 1978), Booth (1983, 1988), Vygotsky (1987), Bruner (1986) and Piaget (1932, 1955, 1959). In the second part of this chapter I make some suggestions about gender differences in the children's responses and draw upon Millard (1997a) and others in developing an analysis of two children's responses to the same story – that of Gareth and Rachel to Grimm's fairy tale *The Seven Ravens*.

The ordering of values

Throughout this thesis I have been concerned with the relationship between children, the stories they read and the contexts in which they read them. Implicit to my inquiry has been the conviction that stories influence their readers, often in unexpected ways and that things happen to children when they read (Protherough, 1983: 3). I discussed this more fully in chapter 3 and have given many examples of how stories often

involve children in discussions of the nature of moral value (good and evil), of characters' virtues and of their moral strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes these extend to verbal and non-verbal imitations of character, at others to emotional engagement that seems unique to the child's experience of what I have called moral touchstones. In this sense, I have been concerned with how fiction contributes to the ordering of values implicit in any response to reading (Booth, 1988: 8ff), and how by following and responding to stories children gain not just vicarious experience but in some important ways, primary experience of the moral life (Lewis, 1961, Vitz, 1990).

#### Moral imagination and the implied reader

This primary experience, if it is to contribute to the development of the child's moral imagination must undergo a process of internalisation that is supported by active participation in dialogue with others. As an aspect of the 'drama of human innerness' (Wojtyla, 1979: 49), I suggest how this takes place through the child's participation in moral rehearsal in response to fiction. I use the term moral rehearsal (adapted from, for example, Kilpatrick, 1994: 24, Bohlin 2005: 36) to describe what happens when some children encounter the moral dimension of text and respond to it as opposed to responding to narrative *in toto*. As a result, I consider moral rehearsal a mode of reading response, a way of acting and being in response to reading fiction which can develop as a result of the reading experience itself (Protherough, 1983: 21). Drawing on the field of contemporary poetics and narratology (e. g. Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, Cohn, 2000), I suggest that two forms of moral rehearsal take place – mimetic rehearsal and diegetic rehearsal – and that they provide both the context and the means for internalisation to take place.

This process, I suggest, takes place through the reflective and reflexive functions of consciousness by which what becomes cognized in consciousness is experienced subjectively by the child (Wojtyla, 1979: 41 - 45). As a consequence of this process, I suggest that the children's subjectivity itself is *shaped* in response to fiction, partly as a consequence of dialogue with others. To illuminate this process I identify aspects of children's discourse by which alternative perspectives and moral attitudes are internalised in dialogue with others, including the 'implied author' (Booth, 1983: 71ff). The focus throughout the chapter is therefore on developing a phenomenological analysis of the moral imagination and the implied reader – the reader's role in performing the text and the 'reader-in-the text' (Benton and Fox, 1985: 10ff, Iser, 1989: 63). Because the children's responses are situated within interview conversations and dialogue, I also explore the intersubjective nature of their responses.

## 10.2 Narrative and the reading subject

The reader's consciousness

Iser (1989) suggests how such a process may be implicated in the ethical effects of fiction upon readers. Playing roles in response to fiction involves incorporating the new experiences gained by doing so:

the reader is affected by the very role he has been given to play, and his being affected does not reinvolve his habitual orientation but mobilizes the spontaneity of the self...It will cast the released spontaneity into a certain shape and thus begin to mould what it has called forth...something is formulated in the reader under conditions that are not set by himself and that thus enable the experience to penetrate into his consciousness. (Iser, 1989: 64)

This is reminiscent of Lewis' principle that in reading fiction, our perceptions of the world are changed and that reading fiction "awakens" a comprehensive range of

human faculties including perception (metaphoric and visual), imagination, affection and emotion (Ryken, 2000a: 23). Thus in reading,

...we become...other selves. Not only nor chiefly to see what they are like but in order to see what they see, to occupy, for a while, their seat in the great theatre. (Lewis, 1961: 139)

The constitution of the reading subject

Elsewhere, Iser (1978: 150) notes that this process also involves the constitution of the reader through the active synthesis of meaning by the reading subject. The awakening of response in the reader thus becomes a kind of imaginative game in which the reader ‘works things out for himself’ within a world set by the text (Iser, 1974: 275). While reading,

The image and the reading subject are indivisible...we are preoccupied with something that takes us out of our own reality...when we put the book down...we...experience a kind of ‘awakening’...[because]...image-building eliminates the subject-object division essential for all perception, so that when we ‘awaken’ to the real world, this division seems all the more accentuated...so that we can view our own world as a thing ‘freshly understood’. (Iser, 1978: 140)

Where the moral dimension of fiction is concerned, I have argued that children use a range of active, participatory strategies in this process of imagination or ‘image-building’ that enable them to make this interaction significant and personally meaningful. This is because the “reality” of the reading experience can illuminate basic patterns of real experience and in this sense, the literary text acts as a kind of ‘mirror’ to experience (Iser, 1978: 281).

Representing the acting person

I have suggested, particularly in chapter 3 above, that vicarious moral experience gained through reading fiction can be seen this way partly because of:

the element of a certain witnessing - ...the fact that the person is a witness to the moral good and evil that arises in...the person's own act or *an act performed by another*. In the latter case, being a witness presupposes some participation in the act and in the lived experience of moral good and evil. (Wojtyla, 1969: 119 emphasis mine).

Fiction emphasises the representation of the acting person and makes present or "public" to us the acting and suffering that constitutes the experience of being-in-the-world with one another:

Narratives, in fact, represent a person acting, who orients him- or herself in circumstances he or she has not created, and who produces consequences he or she has not intended. (Ricoeur, 2000: 261)

#### Possible roles and possible worlds

Not only this, but narratives also embody maps of 'possible roles and possible worlds in which action, thought, and self-determination are permissible (or desirable)' (Bruner, 1986: 66). For children, these become a part of the inner drama of their development, one that – to an important extent - is mediated through encounter, collaboration and negotiation with others (Bruner, 1986: 68, Vygotsky, 1987: 210). Indeed, children's sensitivity and exposure to narrative provides a significant link between their sense of self and others in the social world around them (Bruner, 1986: 69). It also provides an important means to develop that intersubjective way of knowing so central to the moral imagination (Guroian, 1998: 52) and that is such a pervasive feature of the children's responses in this study.

#### Children's worlds in the making

As I have tried to show in chapters 6 – 9, by entering into the imaginative worlds of narrative, children experience the perspective of others. This is effected through the selection of moral touchstones, the creation of alternative narratives of which they are both narrators and narratees and by the dramatisation of character voices, thoughts

and emotions. What ethics tries to supply through reasoned discourse, narrative supplies through image, dialogue, action and motive. What follows is an explication of that delicate oscillation between children and their texts, between the moral worlds of fiction, children's own moral worlds and those of their peers and teacher. I also examine the child's experience of subjectivity and personhood and the contribution of the moral imagination to this process. It is, therefore, essentially a phenomenological account of children's imaginative "worlds in the making" on the assumption that children's identity and character changes, grows and diminishes partly as a result of their imaginative diet (Booth, 1988: 256 - 257).

### 10.3 Diegetic and Mimetic Rehearsal

An ancient division

Throughout the dialogues I collected, children's responses can be divided into those that re-narrate, recount and reflect on incidents from the text and those that also effect narration through imitation. This ancient division between *diegesis* and *mimesis* is similar to that between 'telling' and 'showing' (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 106ff) and was first described by Plato (*Republic*, 2002: 638). I shall use this division to show how children appropriate texts in order to render their significance and to internalise this in consciousness.

Diegetic rehearsal

In diegetic rehearsal, children render accounts of fiction using their own words in speech, and these are usually a combination of alternative narratives about moral touchstones or children's commentary, questions, explanation, description or attempts at re-narrating. *Diegesis* involves the reported words and actions of others, as

in this example from a pair discussion between Darren and Simon about *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*:

it felt like someone his claw just gone straight into his heart it's like the dragon skin made him...it was like an antidote if you put that on...you'd have felt even better 'cause like as soon as the skin went off I think the sadness of him had actually rubbed off and helped him being another good person  
(interview 1.7.03: 148 – 152).

In this example, Darren reports the actions from chapter 7 in which Eustace is un-dragoned by Aslan. His *diegesis* supports evaluation of Eustace's emotions ('sadness') and is constructed around the interesting analogy of an 'antidote' and an alternative narrative about this. This supports his moral evaluation of Eustace's transformation, rehearsing a kind of reflection on the moral significance of Aslan's actions.

#### Mimetic rehearsal

In mimetic rehearsal, on the other hand, children's engagement moves to the level of imitation and emotion. Dramatisation of voices that render character's imaginary speech or thoughts combined with emotional engagement provides opportunities for more direct practice or training in others' perspectives, attitudes and stances about moral touchstones in the texts. Consider this example from Gareth discussing the character of Kino from *The Pearl* in which *diegesis* gives way to *mimesis*:

...because something really really affected him...his son had died and that really made him think and maybe he thought back like Juana does and he thought of all the things and how they were before they found the pearl and maybe he thought *aah its changed and its changed for the worse* so he wanted to go back to how he was but he couldn't actually go back completely because he didn't have a house 'cause it had burnt down

(interview 10.11.03: 303 – 308).

Kino's imaginary voice modulates the sense of loss Gareth is exploring, making it immediate and vivid. Taking Kino's part, Gareth enters a kind of reflexive stance upon Kino's "world", linking it directly to his own and rehearsing a perspective

reached by a character who has experienced pain and desolation in the story. In both cases, memory is invoked; however, as I shall argue below, in diegetic rehearsal reflection and evaluation predominate whilst in mimetic rehearsal a process of reflexion predominates, turning the material of imitation back upon the child as subject and shaping their consciousness.

#### 10.4 Diegetic rehearsal and reflective consciousness

Internalisation and the nature of the person

In the analysis that follows, I adopt Wojtyła's (1976: 227ff) conceptualisation of the term internalisation for the process by which the self is constituted through the mediation of consciousness within the whole context of existence proper to the person (or *suppositum humanum*)<sup>4</sup>. Consciousness itself, in this conception, cannot be identified in its totality with the person, although the continuity and identity of consciousness reflects and also conditions the consciousness and identity of the person (Wojtyła, 1979: 303 note 15). Since human beings exist 'in themselves', their activities have an 'in-self' or 'non-transitive' dimension according to which each person is a 'concrete and unrepeatable' self with an ontological structure that has the capacity to act upon and shape the external world.

Subjectivity and transcendence

By the process of internalisation in consciousness however, the person also comes to experience themselves as a personal subject, determining themselves and their own value (Wojtyła, 1976: 227, 230). The subjectivity of the person for Wojtyła is an irreducible, universal characteristic of the person that is at the same time capable of self-transcendence and objectivity over time:

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<sup>4</sup> In translation from the Polish, both 'interiorization' and 'internalisation' are used to suggest the same process and the same concept in Wojtyła's original works (Rice, J., personal correspondence, 2007).



As human beings grow and change and become interpersonally and intellectually more mature, they recognise a process and a *trajectory of transcendence* in their own life. That is, they come to understand that they have over time transcended – moved beyond and above – their previous self-understanding. In time we all become aware of this movement...this trajectory of transcendence is universal and part of the highest level of human nature. (Vitz, 2006: 127)

The person for Wojtyla is disclosed through active participation with others in reality and in the lived experience of moral value (Wojtyla, 1988: 214). Unlike other more recent conceptions of internalisation, Wojtyla's conceptualisation presupposes an ontological reality to the person that is prior to culture, though deeply influenced by it and able to shape culture in turn. The person, therefore, transcends culture in both an ontological and teleological sense in keeping with the Western metaphysical tradition of both Aquinas and Aristotle.

#### Conceptual tensions

As Daniels (2001: 39) points out however, internalisation and participation have become concepts in tension within recent models of cultural development. Socio-culturalists for example, suggest that cognition is situated in specific social, cultural and historical circumstances. Internalisation therefore becomes the transformation of social functions into individual skills whereas participation becomes the transformation of individual but socially and culturally situated action into cultural development. Within these twin poles of development the question of individual agency arises as a distinguishing feature alongside its relationship to what Wojtyla calls the I-Thou relationship (Wojtyla, 1976: 240ff).

#### The child's contribution

Within a psychological paradigm, the child's contribution to this process of internalisation has been the focus of a number of recent studies. Elbers et al. (1992)

for example, after studying child-adult dyads collaborating over the building of blocks concluded that internalisation is not simply the transmission of culture to the child, but includes the child's appropriation of a jointly created definition of the learning situation. On this basis, they conclude that culture is reproduced and recreated in new ways which include the introduction of novel elements (23 – 24). Similar conclusions have been reached by for example Hoogsteder (1992) about the appropriation of knowledge by the child in the learning situation with adults:

a child is active in a learning situation, and the more one takes an effort to analyse this role, the less clear is the linear transition of the internalization process. (Hoogsteder, 1992: 46)

#### Cultural appropriation and knowledge

Whilst I broadly support this conceptualisation – what might be called the cultural appropriation or apprenticeship theory – I would reject any implicit assumption that all knowledge is an extension of the child's consciousness. With certain kinds of knowledge, objective reality is involved and therefore appropriation might easily become false knowledge or knowledge that does not conform to reality. In passing on their knowledge of the moral life and of the nature of good and evil, the question of normativity and permanence arise in relation to the kind of knowledge that is being internalised by children, and in the case of this study through narrative text.

#### A realist position

Throughout this section and in the final chapter, I maintain my position as one of epistemological realism about knowledge that might be learned by children in classroom situations whilst at the same time acknowledging the child's contribution to making such knowledge 'their own'. Like Vygotsky, I see the importance of social life to the development of the child's consciousness (Wertsch and Addison Stone, 1985:

163). However, unlike Piaget and Vygotsky (Marti, 1996: 59) I consider the child in possession of an inner life, defined not simply as cognition, that is ontologically given and therefore capable of transcending social and cultural influences despite its clear dependence upon them.

The reflective function of consciousness

According to Wojtyła (1976: 226), consciousness internalises all that the human being cognizes and makes it all a content of the subject's lived experience. By imaginatively responding to the material of narrative, children participate in processes of cognition and dynamic forms of speech-as-action that are reflected in consciousness:

The power and efficacy of active understanding allows us to ascertain the meaning of particular things and to intellectually incorporate them, as well as the relations between them, 'into' our consciousness. For to 'understand' means the same as to 'grasp' the meaning of things and their interrelations. (Wojtyła, 1979: 35)

Consciousness therefore reflects what has been constituted and comprehended as the subjective content of being and acting that is conscious (Wojtyła, 1979, p. 31 - 32). This mirroring function of consciousness leads to the apprehension and constitution of objects in consciousness via language and so consciousness therefore reflects or mirrors the penetrating of cognition. However, it also:

interiorizes in its own specific manner what it mirrors, thus encapsulating or capturing it in the person's ego [or self]. (Wojtyła, 1979: 34)

Internalisation and subjectivation

By acting with others on the material of narrative, children internalise imaginary or vicarious experience through the mirroring function of consciousness. However, this process also subjectifies because 'all interiorization and subjectivation is the work of consciousness' by which 'man owes to consciousness the subjectivation of the

objective' (Wojtyla, 1979: 38, 42). This process of reflection or mirroring turns towards previously performed acts – in this case reading and responding to fiction - in order to grasp more fully their objective contents, character, course or structure. In so doing, they become personally meaningful.

#### The eviction of Gumpas

As an example of how the children reflect upon the nature of justice or “fairness”, consider Rachel’s dialogue with Amy about the relative status and treatment of characters in chapter 4 of Lewis’ *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Talking about Lord Bern’s actions in buying King Caspian from the slave traders and in ousting the lazy Governor Gumpas from the Lone Islands on their voyage, the girls participate in creating alternative narratives about these touchstones in order to subjectify and internalise their significance:

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Amy    | Lord Bern only bought Caspian probably that's probably fair really because Caspian I think he do you reckon he's like sort of the main character in this?   |
| Rachel | In a way I think he probably is yeah but...Lucy and Edmund and Eustace must have been like really nervous not knowing what's going to happen to them but Caspian's fine he's alright but they didn't know that but they thought he was fine so they must be quite worried   |
| Amy    | But I reckon that's better right yeah because he's king of Narnia so like if it was Eustace...they wouldn't be able to like you know get battles and that or like speak to the peoples  |
| Rachel | I suppose in a way it's fair in a way it is unfair isn't it?...right <i>throw Governor Gumpas off the island</i> ...in a way I think that's quite fair 'cause he's been really nasty to the people wasn't he?   |
| Amy    | I don't think it's fair   |
| Rachel | Why not?  |
| Amy    | Because he might be poor  |
| Rachel | Oh yeah unfair yes 'cause like in a way it's fair that he's been chucked off because he's been really horrible to his people but in a way I feel sorry for him because like he's lived there for whatever everyone knows him even though he was a bad person...do you know what I mean? so I think that probably was quite nasty really they could have said <i>oh come and help me</i> or whatever something like that |
- (pair discussion 16.6.03: 319 - 341).

### Subjunctivization and the drama of the interior life

This passage illustrates a number of processes at work. First, alternative narratives about Lucy, Edmund, Eustace and Gumpas punctuate the girls' discussion of their treatment and actions. These linked narratives ('must have been...nervous', 'must be worried', 'wouldn't be able to...get battles' and 'might be poor') focus on emotional possibility, potential states and the consequences of action. They 'subjunctivize' the narrative, designating the prospective and hypothetical (Bruner, 1986: 26ff). Such modal transformations 'thicken the connective web that holds narrative together in its depiction of both action and consciousness' providing a basis upon which reflective consciousness internalises such possibilities into the drama of the interior life. They also act as 'perspectival triggers' upon which Rachel creates imaginary character voices that embody these perspectives (29). '*Oh come and help me*' for example is the voice of either Caspian or Lord Bern (the Narnians) constructed to suggest how they might have dealt with Gumpas the wayward Governor of the Lone Islands – with an attempt at reconciliation rather than exile.

### Moral memories

In these examples, Rachel develops her stock of "moral maps" and images about human possibility and about the nature of human relationships. Internalised through reflective consciousness, such moral memories can be re-awakened in imagination as experiences and images for interpreting the world:

memory is...associated with the imagination, for memory is thought to provide images out of which the imagination construes the ultimate shape and meaning that we attach to the world. (Guroian, 2005: 70 - 71)

This important property of the imagination is, as I have argued throughout this thesis, nurtured by the internalisation of such moral touchstones as the buying back of

Caspian and the sacking of Gumpas in Narnia. Alternative narratives provide a range of perspectives on these touchstones that ensure the significance of the text's narrative world is captured in the child's consciousness.

#### The enrichment of concepts

The process of reflection in this example of the girls' dialogue also contributes towards a process of generality in linking their understanding of "fairness" to its effect on the characters in the imagined present and future. The essence of generalization, according to Vygotsky (1987: 224) lies in the enrichment of reality that it represents and is accomplished by the kind of complex connections between objects evident in the girls' dialogue. In representing features of the narrative in this way it could be argued that the children here begin an enrichment of their concepts of justice or "fairness" but in a way that arises:

under the decisive and determining influence of knowledge the child acquires from those around [her]. (Vygotsky, 1987: 173)

Here this consists of other children and could be related to the development of consciousness as such because the foundation of conscious awareness is the generalization or abstraction of mental processes which leads to their mastery and transferability to other domains of thought (Vygotsky, 1987: 191).

This process of generalization I have described suggests that the girls are developing 'scientific' or 'non-spontaneous' thinking or conceptualization about justice or "fairness" in conjunction with and on the basis of their own participation with each other's 'spontaneous' concepts. For Vygotsky, 'spontaneous' concepts are ideas arrived at by our own inference or through direct experience and 'non-spontaneous'

concepts are ideas taken over from others, especially teachers in instructional contexts (Vygotsky, 1987: 191ff, Britton, 1994: 260). However,

Scientific concepts are not simply acquired or memorized by the child and assimilated by his memory but arise and are formed through an extraordinary effort of his own thought. (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 176 - 177)

### Contrasting voices

Because scientific and spontaneous concepts can enhance each other (Britton, 1994: 260, Thompson, 2006: 212), here the children move from determining how Caspian's capture was both unfair to Lucy, Edmund and Eustace and fair to Caspian because of his status as King of Narnia. This leads them to conceptualise Gumpas' nastiness by imaginatively contrasting his behaviour to others and by enacting his voice. The "fairness" of ridding the islands of Gumpas thus appears justified by such a juxtaposition. The 'scientific concept' "fairness" is also enhanced by its relation to the spontaneous concreteness of Caspian's potential ("to get battles") and the expression of Gumpas' nastiness ("horrible to his people"). A subtle process of interaction and negotiation takes place here, further extending the means by which the reflective function of consciousness internalises the girls' ideas. Implicated in this process, as I suggested above, is the development of the child's consciousness; indeed, through consciousness such concepts are recreated in imagination and expressed in words (Vygotsky, 1987: 183).

### Pattern and perspective

Alternative narratives in particular perform this function throughout this dialogue, mirroring at once that which is appropriated from text and expressing the child's subjectivity. Lucy, Edmund and Eustace's nerves and thoughts about Caspian, Eustace's ineptitude for getting 'battles' and Gumpas' suggested poverty are all

missing from Lewis' original narrative yet imagined here and recreated in words in order to rehearse what it might mean to evaluate justice in the lives of others. Dramatised voices such as those used by Rachel – *'throw Governor Gumpas off the island'* and *'oh come and help me'* – return to the subject, leaving the echo of their sound and the pattern of their perspective located within consciousness, shaping and blending it with the conceptual understanding arrived at in dialogue.

The experience of identity

Coloured by the sympathy Rachel feels for Gumpas, the justice of the first voice (*'throw Gumpas off the island'*) is a reflexive contrast to the second (*'oh come and help me'*) so that by internalising a memory of two perspectives "fairness" or justice is cast in terms of the 'drama of human innerness' and an accompanying moral evaluation (Wojtyla, 1979: 49). By forming an identity in imagination with a fictional other, taking their voice and vicariously experiencing it in this way, the child's consciousness 'penetrates the subject shaping it experientially' contributing to the formation of the child's experience of themselves as a subject and of their identity (Wojtyla, 1979: 47). This important process of imitation that leads to internalisation - what I call mimetic rehearsal - I explore further below in another example. I also consider its relation to the emergence and expression of the spiritual life of the child – an innerness of being and acting brought to light in the intimate relation between the reading experience and the reflexive function of consciousness.

### **10.5 Mimetic rehearsal and reflexive consciousness**

The reflexive function of consciousness

The other process at work in the development of children's moral imaginations in their experience of reading is the reflexive function of consciousness (Wojtyla, 1979:



41ff). This accompanies the mirroring function of consciousness in reflection upon action - in this case responding to fiction. The reflexive function of consciousness enables what is mirrored in consciousness to be experienced subjectively and turned back upon the subject. This leads to the experience of subjectivity, or the experience of oneself as a subject and the subject of one's own actions and experiences:

owing to the reflexive function of consciousness man's being is directed, as it were 'inward' [and] being directed 'inward' is accompanied by experiencing...Consciousness, as long as it only mirrors and is but a reflected image, remains objectively aloof from the ego [or self]; when, however it becomes the basis of experience, when experience is constituted by its reflexivity, the objective aloofness disappears and consciousness penetrates the subject *shaping* it experientially every time an experience occurs...[it] shapes the ego in the pure subjectiveness of experience. (Wojtyła, 1979: 46 - 47)

In describing the 'autoteleological' structure of human action, he also refers to this as the intransitivity of the person whereby 'I cannot relate to different objects of activity' (e. g. fiction) 'and choose different values without thereby determining myself and my value' (Wojtyła, 1976: 229 - 230).

#### Reflexive voices

In the reading experience and in the experience of response to fiction it could be argued that the child's consciousness is constituted and shaped through the reflexive disclosure of inwardness associated specifically with imaginative imitation of others. Children's imaginative voices or dramatisations, in particular it could be argued, have a role in shaping their subjective experience, their experience of themselves as a subject and their sense of identity. The child, becoming momentarily an imaginary "other" in speech or inner thought enters vicariously into that "other's" experience but also turns that experience "inward" upon themselves. These reflexive voices combined with the reflection and experience of alternative narratives therefore create

rich opportunities for children in the experience of subjectivity and of the possibilities of being-in-the-world.

Aslan the merciful

In this example, also from children's discussions of Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* Darren combines alternative narratives about Eustace's transformation into a dragon and his rehabilitation by Aslan the lion with imitations of the characters' thoughts rendered as direct speech (part of what I call mimetic rehearsal). It should be noted though, that this dialogue also combines indirect speech with some analogies which form part of Darren's *diegesis* or imaginative retelling of the narrative in order to rehearse its moral significance and meaning in terms he can grasp:

- Darren      Because Aslan knows he's learnt his lesson from being a dragon 'cause now he's being feeling sorry for the people doing the work he wants to be a human again so Aslan thought *why make this man suffer when he's learned this lesson?* so he goes and helps him and Aslan's claws are even sharper than Eustace 'cause like when he tried to scratch it off a new layer just was underneath it as if then Aslan went *you* told him to lay down and he got his claw and ripped all the skin off ...and *it felt really really really really painful*
- Res.          So what did you think about the way Aslan treated Eustace then?
- Darren      I think he treated him like one of his own family helping him and everything like
- Res.          Did it surprise you at all or were you...?
- Darren      I was very shocked I thought he'd have been like sentenced him to something or told him to go away and never come back...I thought he'd have been shouting at him for accusing everyone then start saying *now look what's happened to you look what you've done to all these people now how do you feel about it?*
- Res.          So what surprised you about the way he acted then?
- Darren      I was surprised that he actually started to help him after he'd done all that horrible things to the sailors and everyone...and like I thought *I can't do be bothered to do this well 'cause I'm just going to leave them on their own...*I thought that was really really nasty of him that's like letting someone do all the work on their own  
(interview 1.7.03: 90 - 120).

In this example we see Darren make interesting connections between thought, speech and action in which he imagines Aslan's voice to try to understand how a character could act in a way so contrary to Darren's own expectations. Where Darren expected punishment ('shouting at him'), he reads about and responds to Aslan's mercy. To do

this he imagines Aslan's voice by juxtaposing two different intentions and considering both – Aslan considering mercy (*'why make this man suffer?'*) and Aslan meting out accusation (*'now look what's happened...'*), neither of which exist as speech in Lewis' original.

#### Dramatising perspectives

This double intention is reminiscent of Bakhtin's (1981: 280, 284) 'dramatizing discourse' which functions to dramatise different perspectives in appropriating the text and yet in creating imaginative, spoken variations upon it (Bakhtin, 1981: 284). The juxtaposition of the voices of Aslan the Merciful with Aslan the Accuser allows Darren to consider both in dialogue with each other in his imagination and to explore his own surprise and shock that Aslan shows Eustace not condemnation but mercy. This kind of imitation or *mimesis* serves another function suggested by Piaget (1955) in relation to the way in which children objectify "others" in their worlds:

...through imitation, the child begins to analyze the acts of another person.  
(Piaget, 1955: 252)

#### Internalising vicarious experience

Imitation, as I suggested above, also connects the perspectives offered (mercy and accusation) with the child as subject and their experience of subjectivity. Through the reflexive function of consciousness such mimetic rehearsal shapes the child as subject by turning the contents of consciousness back upon the subject so internalising both perspectives and the vicarious experience of moral agency (Wojtyla, 1979). The voice of Eustace, also evident in this dialogue, further dramatises the "heteroglot" utterances inherent in fiction itself. It discloses how the contradictory moral forces at work in Lewis' imaginary world have become Darren's "own", populated with his own intentions and part of his own discourse in a 'contradictory and multi-linguaged

world’ – one that tries to express the meaning and significance of Eustace’s pain and laziness in dialogue with me (Bakhtin, 1981: 275, 293).

The mediation of identity

Such mimetic rehearsal, I would suggest, is potentially important to the formation of children’s identity. This is because, as I argued in chapter 2, one of the best ways for a child to develop a healthy moral life – habits of good behaviour towards others – is a life based not on legalistic principles or rules, but on other lives (Kilpatrick, 1992: 98ff). Because of this, knowledge about good behaviour as well as about bad behaviour needs to be mediated through others and it is the argument of this thesis that fiction has a potentially powerful role to play in this process. Calling into question the Cartesian notion of the autonomous *cogito*, Bailie (2006) suggests that the human person is,

endowed with a deep-seated and irrevocable desire to fulfil itself by falling under the influence of another. (Bailie, 2006: 11)

If this is so, then children need possible models – touchstones - from which to rehearse possible roles or *personae*. I explored some of the children’s responses to these in chapter 6 on moral touchstones. Through the intersubjective dimension of reading and responding to fiction, children may discover that in order to find themselves and their own subjectivity they have to surrender themselves to imaginary others taking their places in the “great theatre” of the literary imagination. In the process they may discover that,

Literature heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality...in reading...I see with myriad eyes...as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself. (Lewis, 1961: 140 - 141)

## 10.6 The role of memory and emotion

### Moral imagination and the experience of value

It is important to note that because both actions and moral values belong to the real subject, to man as their agent, such internalisations or inner disclosures that accompany the dynamic actions of reading response also participate in the experience of moral value (Wojtyla, 1979). For children in responding to fiction, this means that strategies such as selecting moral touchstones and creating alternative narratives also participate in the experience of moral value and intersubjectivity:

...both functions of consciousness participate in this remarkable drama of human innerness, the drama of good and evil enacted on the inner stage of the human person. Thus consciousness, owing to its mirroring function...allows us...to gain objective awareness of good and evil. (Wojtyla, 1979: 49)

Consciousness also allows children, in its reflexive function to gain vicarious experience of moral values by their active participation in, for example the creation of alternative narratives and dramatisation. In this way, voices that imitate or rehearse the perspectives of others allow the child to experience him or herself as a vicarious actor or agent with a specific moral value in relation to *the other*. They may also provide the occasion for the mapping of children's subjective worlds onto those of imaginary others (Bruner, 1986: 63) and the growth of that intersubjective and relational way of knowing that requires memory and imagination and which is the hallmark of the moral imagination (Guroian, 1998: 52).

### The power of emotions

Throughout this process of moral rehearsal, the important role of emotions that I discussed in chapter 9 should not be neglected. This is because emotions are not only

reflected in consciousness but also affect in their own way the image that is formed in consciousness of various objects:

Diverse feelings emotionalize consciousness...they blend with its two functions – mirroring and reflexiveness – thereby modifying in one way or another their character. (Wojtyla, 1979: 52 - 53)

This modifying power of emotions has great importance because in an emotion we are reacting to a value and the ability to experience profound or powerful emotions seems to be a particularly important part of the interior life more generally (Wojtyla, 1981: 102 - 103). In this example from Anna's dialogues, emotions penetrate the different levels of speech in her discussion of chapter 4 of *Moonfleet*:

Res.	...what about other choices some other characters or John himself make can you remember?
Anna	Maybe Elzevir and Ratsey while they were down in the vault and standing up for John 'cause the smugglers were saying <i>I'm not so keen on that John Trenchard he's been snooping around the vault...looking out to sea...thinking they thought he was a spy and Ratsey and Elzevir stuck up for him saying he was a good lad and he loves the churchyard and he loves the sea</i> and things like that and that was what I felt was a good deed but yeah it might have still lost friendship
Res.	Between who?
Anna	Ratsey Elzevir and John
Res.	Why do you think that might have happened?
Anna	Most likely because they were involved with the smuggling and John wouldn't really want to be there and but yeah they might be lying about what they feel about John cause they feel he might be there or they feel <i>oh no he's there...</i>

(Anna 17.5.04: 167 - 183).

Thinking rationally

In the original text, the hero John Trenchard overhears a conversation between the smugglers of Moonfleet Village whilst hiding in the vault of Moonfleet Church. At one point, a smuggler named Parminter voices his suspicions about John having discovered the smuggler's hideout in the vault:

there is a boy of Trenchard's that I mistrust; he is for ever wandering in the graveyard, and I have seen him a score of times sitting on this tomb and looking out to sea. (Meade Falkner, 1983: 52)

Later in the same scene, John is defended by Ratsey one of the other smugglers, who says he thinks 'the boy is well enough...and has told me many times he seeks the churchyard because there is a fine view to be had there of the sea, and 'tis the sea he loves' (53).

Anna's retention of aspects of these character voices ('*looking out to sea*' and '*he loves the sea*') provide a framework upon which she has transformed them through mimetic rehearsal to focus on the essential or 'original emotions' (Iser, 1978: 174 - 175). In this way she contrasts Parminter's disapproval with Ratsey's affirmation of John's goodness, evoking them in the concreteness of verbs ('*snooping around*') and nouns ('*churchyard...sea*'). Her evaluation of these contrasting voices is to side with Ratsey and Elzevir – 'that was a good deed' - a reminder perhaps, of how children's responses to literature offer opportunities like this to develop the ability to think rationally within an emotionally coloured context (Rosenblatt, 1938: 217).

The enrichment of character zones

The two voices here are also a good example of the way in which Anna's discourse creates two independent 'character zones' from 'the fragments of character speech' to express the activity of her understanding (Bakhtin, 1981: 316). The accompanying emotions of approval/disapproval, love, desire and loss in this passage all contribute to the emotionalization of consciousness I discussed above that actively enriches the semantic intentions present in the original speech fragments (Bakhtin, 1981: 281). The overall effect is the recreation of multiple viewpoints – Anna's and the characters of Ratsey and Parminter. Each speaks to the other, as in the original text except that

Anna's judgement is laid over the two voices in her subjunction of what 'might' have happened if Ratsey had been 'lying' about John – lost friendship and no real story to tell thereafter.

#### Understanding and response

The importance of emotion in this passage is connected to this 'merged' or simultaneous activity of understanding and response in Anna's speech, one that

assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions...understanding comes to fruition only in the response. (Bakhtin, 1981: 282)

By entering into dialogue with the voices of the text, Anna gains a clearer grasp of her own emotional understanding. She also, as I suggested above, through the reflective and reflexive functions of consciousness gains vicarious experience of varying emotional stances towards the hero's actions as well as the experience of their agency in the dialogue. Her own voice, made clear in the evaluation of these two agents is supplemented by further probing of alternative narratives about the smugglers – that they 'wouldn't really want to be there', or that 'they might be lying'. The final voice dramatises this contrast as she imagines the smugglers discovering John in the vault, momentarily taking up the alternative to the actual plot.

#### Emotion, memory and spiritual values

The subtlety with which Anna moves between diegetic and mimetic rehearsal, between recollections of the original text, dramatised voices, evaluation and emotionalization suggests an imagination populated by the perspectives of others. To find her way amongst these perspectives, Anna returns to a familiar moral touchstone in her responses to the text - the friendship and love between John and Elzevir. For Anna, it may be that Ratsey's 'good deed' is not really to protect John, but to



recognise in him a simple goodness and love of the sea. In other words, these images of John's goodness conveyed through the use of dramatisation and emotionalization become synonymous with a spiritual or supra-material value, the nature of love (Wojtyla, 1981: 103).

It is possible that such images may also contribute powerfully to the development of the moral imagination and to the child's attachment to goodness by becoming the kind of "flashbulb memories" I discussed in chapter 9. These memories have a high level of activation on recall because of an association with strong emotional responses (Kintsch, 1998: 420 - 421). They may become part of the child's 'internal weather' – emotional memories that are part of a self that cannot be changed (Vitz, 2006: 123). Because the dramatic nature of stories enables us to rehearse and strengthen our solidarity with the good (Kilpatrick, 1994: 24), such images also provide a potential training ground for the experience of value. These experiences and images, as I have suggested throughout this thesis, therefore become part of the child's view of the world, setting the stage for future decisions with the potential to influence them in the moment of decision:

intentional willing...because of the experience of value...assumes the form of deliberation, choice or decision making. (Wojtyla, 1979: 142)

In this way, children may be enabled to pass from imitation to initiation in moral and spiritual values through the life of the imagination and culture (Lewis, 1940a: 81). Such a process also suggests the potential importance of children's emotional responses in the additional comprehension and engagement with narrative that may be further enabled due to such memories. This is because such memories may be

constantly re-evoked in new reading contexts as the basis of comparison with new material from the same (or new) narrative:

That which is remembered becomes open to new connections, and these in turn influence the expectations aroused by the...[new]...sequence of sentences...throughout the reading process there is a continual interplay between modified expectations and transformed memories. (Iser, 1978: 111)

In enabling a process of “connectability of memories” about moral touchstones in the narrative, responses concerning value by children contribute to the synthesizing activity of the reader which itself ‘enables the text to be translated and transferred to his [or her] own mind’ (Iser, 1978: 111 - 112). Emotion and memory as indicators of the experience of value therefore become important resources in children’s future comprehension and reading response.

## **10.7 The question of objectivity and moral content**

### **Cognition and reality**

Throughout chapters 6 - 10 I have focused on processes by which the children appear to internalise the material of narrative fiction creating memories, images and points of view on the actions and persons of imaginary others. I have used the term moral rehearsal for this process. Increasing socialisation, as Piaget (1959: 277) once remarked, is a function of children’s ability to be self-conscious and to take different viewpoints, distinguishing them from their own and relating to them. In understanding others, reciprocity is important. However, the question inevitably arises as to the content of what children internalise from their individual and social engagements with fiction. This is especially so from the point of view of children’s moral lives, particularly if growth in the moral life involves adjustment to objective

reality and not just a subjective determination of one's own "values" (Lewis, 1943a: 29ff, Wojtyla, 1981: 158ff). Cognition, because it bears a specific relation to reality,

does not in any way create 'reality' (cognition does not create its own content), but arises within the context of the different kinds of content that are proper to it...cognition arises thanks to the various kinds of *esse*, thanks to the enormous richness and complexity of reality. (Wojtyla, 1969: 116)

The witness of moral experience

Such complexity and richness includes of course, the experience of fiction. But it also includes how morality is mediated to and amongst children through fiction as a form of experience. Such experience could be said to be like 'an original and unceasing call of reality to our cognitive powers' (Wojtyla, 1969: 117). Because moral experience, as I suggested in chapter 3, involves the child as a witness, either to his or her own acts or the acts of others, fiction can potentially strengthen the essential connection between morality and humanity. The role of emotion in this process would seem to be of special importance, as I suggested above and in chapter 9. This is because,

The reality of morality manifests itself to us through our feelings. By means of feeling, we become witnesses in a special way to both the moral value of our acts, witnesses to good and evil, and so to the strict connection of this good and evil with ourselves as persons, with our own human essence, with our humanity. (Wojtyla, 1969: 124)

Emotion and image

This affective connection, so important in the organisation of experience and in the workings of the imagination (upon which I have already commented in chapters 3 and 9), is both powerfully helpful but also potentially misleading for children in responding to fiction. This is because of the inherent plasticity of human emotions such that they are not only reflected in consciousness but also affect in their own specific way the image that is formed there of various objects (Wojtyla, 1979: 52).

Emotions, in other words, can change the subjective “shape” of objects reflected in consciousness, potentially distorting them. Because of this, strong emotional responses to fiction may or may not be what Augustine called “ordinate” responses to the objective nature of a character’s actions (Lewis, 1943a: 14 - 15). To some extent, this will be controlled or at least directed in the transactions between reader and text by the author through his or her use of rhetorical devices such as creating situations where readers have to “take sides”, evaluative description, repetition or highlighting (Booth, 1983: 169ff, Ryken, 2000b: 90 - 91).

#### Communities of moral discernment

Because of the subjectivising influences of emotion in response to fiction and because of the multiplicity of worldviews contained in fiction there is, I would suggest, an important role for what in chapter 2 I called “authoritative communities” in guiding children in their understanding of the moral dimension of fiction. The role of such communities – families, schools or religious traditions – is related, though not identical, to the guidance that most parents and teachers try to give children about the distinction of moral values. The use of stories in moral education has a long tradition in most cultures wherever people have passed on their moral and cultural heritage to their children. Indeed it could be cited as one of the universal aspects of moral education (Vitz, 1990: 717). However, both parents and teachers have an important part to play in helping children’s discernment of moral values and the realm of fiction and the imagination, in my view, should not be exempt from this. I make some suggestions connected to this in the next chapter.

## 10.8 The influence of gender

### Boys, girls and reading

To conclude my analysis, I now turn to the influence of gender on the children's responses to fiction and to some remarks about differences between the ways in which boys and girls approach the moral dimension of fiction. The significance of gender as a key variable in social life and as a key factor in the process of education is now well established (e. g. Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989: 59 - 60, Cohen et al., 2000: 34 - 35). I therefore begin with a short survey of relevant findings about reading and gender and how these relate to the development of the moral imagination. In order to develop my analysis of the children's responses, I then focus on two children - Gareth and Rachel - and their contrasting responses to Grimm's fairy tale *The Seven Ravens*.

Since the publication of the Ofsted reports *Boys and English* (Ofsted, 1993) and *The Gender Divide* (Ofsted, 1996), it has become increasingly clear that significant differences exist between the performance of boys and girls within English especially with regard to reading. Girls continue to outperform boys in National Tests for reading at both Key Stages 2 and 3, a trend observable for a number of years now. Nationally for example, in 2006 87% of girls scored Level 4 or above in Key Stage 2 English reading tests, compared with 79% of boys. At Key Stage 3 the difference was more pronounced with 74% of girls scoring Level 5 or above for reading compared to 59% of boys (NLT, 2007a). Internationally, boys' underachievement in reading is far greater in England and Wales than in other economically developed countries such as the USA, Switzerland or New Zealand and the gap between girls and boys aged nine in this country is more than twice that of the US and Switzerland (NLT,

2007b). The differences at GCSE are similarly wide; in 2004 for example, girls were as much as 14 percentage points ahead of boys in GCSE English (DfES, 2007).

#### Boys, reflection and affective experience

Based on the inspection of 51 secondary or middle schools and one sixth form college, the 1993 report *Boys and English* observed that girls were keener on reading than boys, read more fiction than boys though with good teaching these differences were less sharp. Most significantly however, the report also observed that there was little evidence of boys discussing the affective aspects of their experience of fiction, an important focus of this thesis (Ofsted, 1993: 3 - 5). The 2003 Ofsted report on *Boys' Achievement in Secondary Schools* based on evidence from over 50 secondary schools consequently suggests that, in good English lessons, teachers should give boys time to think and reflect when answering questions about English (Ofsted, 2003: 31). This is supported by the findings of the *Raising Boys' Achievement* project which looked at strategies with the potential to make a difference to boys' (and girls') literacy learning in over fifty primary, secondary and special schools in England over four years (DfES, 2005). Although many boys achieve well at school, the authors suggest that boys are helped to become successful and satisfied readers

when teachers...take the pedagogic decision to give pupils space to talk and reflect about their reading, to share ideas about text and what was enjoyable in it. (DfES, 2005: 9 - 10)

#### Children's reading choices

This may be related to several other findings from studies of boys' and girls' reading patterns. Hall and Coles' (1999) important replication study - based on Whitehead et al.'s (1977) survey of children's reading habits - looked at children's reading choices at ages 10 - 14 years. They found for example, not only that girls tend to read more than

boys, but that children's reading choices become increasingly gender specific as they move into adolescence. This is consistent with Holden's (2002: 105) findings that at ages 8 – 10, there are still greater similarities in reading taste between boys and girls than differences. For girls in Hall and Coles' (1999) study however, fiction seems to provide more reference points for discussion, conversation and their own stories. Girls also tend to talk about their identifications with families or communities in the books that they read. For boys, however, a more detached relationship to their reading was evident in the survey in which boys emphasised independence and autonomy in their reading as opposed to its intersubjective aspects (75 - 79). Despite this, the survey showed that boys' book reading is still primarily narrative, but that changes in boys' interests may be related to patterns of book marketing that mediate popular "adult" culture – often a form of 'rampant consumerism' - to children:

If we look at boys' book choices we can see how boys are making early entry into a stereotypical male world of technical invention, action, machinery and hard objects. (Hall and Coles, 1997: 65 - 66)

#### The culture of the classroom

For girls on the other hand, literacy more generally appears to operate as an aspect of social discourse linked to the development of values and group cultures. The authors suggest that, where boys are concerned, a growing association between literacy and English that stresses personal and empathetic response has developed in the classroom, perhaps at the expense of analysis and evaluation (Hall and Coles, 1999: 87). A similar point is made in the *Boys and English* report that an over-concentration on features such as identification with characters may be unhelpful for boys in responding to literature, even in classes with good teaching (Ofsted, 1993: 3 - 5). However, it seems to me that the important point at issue here is whether the imaginative processes of empathy and identification are important for boys or not,

irrespective of their personal preferences. As I have suggested previously, for example in chapters 3 and 4, such skills are arguably central to children's moral lives – those of both boys and girls - and fiction has a role to play in developing these skills.

#### Relationships, action and the reading subject

Millard's (1997a) study of boys' and girls' reading interests and pleasures also discusses how approaches to the teaching of English that stress the child's inner world of feeling and response may be at the expense of analysis and evaluation. As I suggest below, however, it is clear from my research that children carry out *both* these types of responses to the moral dimension of fiction, often together and in special ways. Citing the Cox Report (DES, 1989b) as emphasising the imaginative experience of children's reading in their emotional, aesthetic and intellectual development, Millard also suggests that classroom choices of fiction sometimes disadvantage boys. Fiction that stresses relationships and the development of character may be of less interest to boys who seek interest in plot, action and the delineation of a physical "world" through narration.

However, such arguments can sometimes miss the question I have considered earlier in this chapter – the constitution of the reading subject within the different cultural and ideological worlds of fiction (Millard, 1997a: 42 - 45). Children's reading, as I have argued above, has a potential role to play in enlarging their sense of reality and in shaping their sense of self, particularly in relation to their everyday expectations. Despite this,

Many of those [boys and girls] who do read for pleasure choose books which confirm only a narrow, repetitive and stereotyped view of the world and what it is to be either male or female. (Millard, 1997a: 97)



### The question of value

It could be argued for example, that popular fiction series or “mass-market” books such as *Point Horror* or the “problem” books of Judy Blume, far from providing truly imaginative experiences for boys or girls, do not challenge their expectations, their views of the world nor of what it means to be truly human (Landsberg, 1987: 204ff). For boys in adolescence especially, the pervasive influence of “youth culture” seems to corrode earlier ties to the reading of fiction developed at both home and school (Millard, 1997b: 46). Significantly, interest in the “classics” has almost completely declined in children’s personal reading despite the generally acknowledged importance of certain stories (such as the quest story) in both supporting the formation of children’s identity and in mediating the history of imagination and feeling within cultures (Millard, 1997a: 113). The kinds of fictional “worlds” offered to children in the classroom however, and the values they embody or even promote is notably absent in Millard’s analysis - a point I take up further below in its relation to the lived contents of imagination for boys and girls.

### Identity and preference

In fact, the repertory of images and themes – of moral touchstones – through which developing readers picture themselves and the world is never value-neutral. For boys and girls in adolescence when the search for identity is influenced by the bodily changes of puberty, the need to imagine “acceptable” versions of maleness and femaleness takes place within a value-laden context (Appleyard, 1991: 99). Stories such as the traditional romance genre that combine adventure, extended characterisation and relationships between characters continue to be popular with both boys and girls (Appleyard, 1991, Hall and Coles, 1999). Perhaps this is because the struggle with danger that attracts boy readers may be offset by the persistence of

reconciliation and restoration in the endings of such stories as themes that attract girls. Contrasts in boys' and girls' preferences in story-telling can also be extended to include for girls, the importance of helping or healing others, the family as refuge, animals as helpers and the simple acceptance of the fact of death. For boys, preferences might also include stories of superhuman strength, monsters, heroes, danger, violence, blood and mayhem (Paley 1981: 203 - 204 cited in Appleyard, 1991: 92).

#### Feeling and action

However, two important points need making about these differences. First, for both boys and girls such differences express an overall concern with human vulnerability and fears about vulnerability. Secondly, in growing up

the task of venturing into the world and of coming to terms with the good and evil there faces both boys and girls. (Appleyard, 1991: 92 - 93)

As I have argued throughout this thesis, fiction can potentially provide developing readers with opportunities to engage with such contradictory forces and to widen their perspectives on them. For boys and girls, I would suggest that the question of value occupies a central place within what may be quite contrasting gender discourses about fiction – for example, discourses of feeling for girls and discourses of action for boys (Simpson, 1996: 271).

#### Discourses of moral value

This is consistent with Gilligan's (1982) findings on moral development. While both boys and girls recognize the feelings of others, boys are more likely to focus on defining persons' acts and plans. Girls on the other hand, are more likely to experience and share the feelings of actors involved in plans (Beach and Hynds, 1996:

468). I would suggest however, that for both boys and girls discourses of moral value may be mediated for both genders through such contrasting approaches. Diegetic and mimetic rehearsal may have a role to play within *both* sets of gender specific discourse – the inner logic of actions within the object-world of the text and the intersubjectivity of relationships each an aspect of the efficacy of the acting person (Wojtyla, 1976: 228ff, 1979: 60ff). In the light of these findings, I now turn to an examination of two children's responses to the Grimm fairy tale *The Seven Ravens*.

## 10.9 Fairy tales and gender roles

Inner and outer worlds

Writing about fairy tales, Bettelheim points out that they often transcend sexual stereotyping precisely because,

even when a girl is depicted as turning inward in her struggle to become herself, and a boy as aggressively dealing with the external world, these two *together* symbolize the two ways in which one has to gain selfhood: through learning to understand and master the inner as well as the outer world. (Bettelheim, 1975: 226)

Male and female figures often appear in the same roles in fairy tales and children like Gareth in this study - as I suggested in chapter 5 - found it easy to switch genders in dialogue, sensing perhaps that whatever the sex of the protagonist, the story has something to teach them of value.

*The Seven Ravens* and redemptive suffering

I have remarked in previous chapters how Grimm's fairy tale *The Seven Ravens* provided a number of moral touchstones for Gareth and Rachel in their responses to story. In chapter 6 for example, I suggested that the incident in which the heroine chops off her finger to effect the rescue of her seven brothers acts as an image of

self-sacrifice against which Gareth and Rachel can test their experience and understanding of duty, devotion and care for others. As a moral vision of the nature of redemptive suffering from the inside (Kilpatrick, 1992: 137), the incident acts as a touchstone for their imaginations that gives shape to their moral responses. I suggested earlier in this chapter that through the reflective function of consciousness, such images become part of children's memories and understanding of the world. They also have the further potential - through the reflexive power of consciousness - to shape the child's experience of subjectivity (Wojtyla, 1979: 44).

Gareth: The object-world of the story

I have also argued in chapters 3 and 6 for example, that in a fundamental sense the main actions of narrative are those in which characters make choices. To this extent, character expresses values in action (Taylor, 2002: 412). Both Gareth and Rachel were interested in this aspect of *The Seven Ravens* and on the value that could be put upon actions within the story. Some important differences are evident, however. Gareth for example, is consistently alert to the object-world of the story and how this provides a context for action. His dialogue about this story is punctuated with object references both from the story and from his own 'answering imagination' (Ryken, 2000b: 113). The heroine's finger, the glass mountain, the stick from the star, the moon and the sun (recreated by him as a 'ball of fire' and 'cold stone' respectively), an imaginary forest, food, drink and objects for the heroine's journey all appear repeatedly in his responses.

Where action appears, it is dramatised by voices, linked to his experience or recreated against the familiarity of the physical world of the story some of which is supplied

from his imagination. The physical landscape of *The Seven Ravens* appears of special interest to Gareth – an aspect of the story not commented on by Rachel at all:

Gareth ...I was surprised that she chopped her finger off...I probably wouldn't 've...I'd have gone searching for a stick instead of...but I haven't been in that situation so...

Res. But if you were in that situation...a stick...why a stick?

Gareth Because that's what...the stars gave her...

Res. So why do you think she did the finger then?

Gareth ...maybe...the surroundings around there wasn't...it might've just been...like a dessert land with no trees and no sticks...so that would've been the only option...but...if it was say...at the end of a forest then...but I don't know...it doesn't tell you about where she is apart from...at the doors of the glass mountain  
(interview 28.3.03: 161 - 178).

Here the landscape provides the context for Gareth's consideration of the girl's "options" or possibilities for action, a feature of imaginative reflection also common to Rachel's responses when she suggests that the girl 'could have gone back to the person that gave her the present [the stick] to see if they'd like tricked her' (interview 1.4.06: 171 - 172).

### Virtue, efficacy and transcendence

This interest, common to both children, is essentially an interest and awareness of the virtue of prudence by which ‘we...try to gather the greatest possible number of means, to seek the best means and to choose it’ (Jaroszynski and Anderson, 2003: 57). In this way, both Gareth and Rachel reflect their interest in that interior struggle that accompanies human freedom:

It is in ourselves that the drama of our liberty is played out, and it is played out through what we do...it is in action that the whole person is gathered into the task of responsible freedom. (Schmitz, 1993: 77)

In chapter 2 I discussed how through the moral imagination, inner connections of agents with their acts is the basis of a perception that sees into the ethical nature of the world (Guroian, 2005: 71). For both Rachel and Gareth the connection between

the girl's agency – or what might also be called efficacy (Wojtyla, 1979: 57) – and possible courses of action are of interest in relation to the choices she actually makes. This is especially so with this moral touchstone about the girl's finger, partly I would suggest because of its extreme nature, but also perhaps because of how it represents the transcendent nature of the person in surrendering the self for others. Such a discourse of value seems, for Gareth, to be connected to his ability to imagine the action of the story within the "concretization" of physical reality provided by small clues in the story and supplemented by his imagination (Ingarden, 1973: 53, Iser, 1978: 169).

Rachel: Including the other

In contrast to Gareth, for whom it is 'cool...*wicked*' (interview 28.3.03: 59 - 63), Rachel is rather sickened by the violence of the heroine's actions in chopping off her finger, despite the fact that she also admires the girl and even wishes she were more like her:

I think I'd like to be the girl chopping her finger off...I think it's like quite important thing...'cause I'm an evil person at home so...I'm always fighting and very bossy and horrible...I think it would be a change to be like quite in a way a nice character... she was like nice she carried on she wanted to do it she was quite / *need to do this I want to do this* and kind of thing

(interview 1.4.03: 363 - 388).

Rehearsing a voice helps Rachel to reinforce the girl's moral strength, stamping upon her decision the authenticity of an interior life, albeit imaginary. Granting the character such interiority is itself an act of generosity, suggesting how Rachel's imagination is capable of including the other, and how much she is willing to entertain the possibility that others may be better than herself, more courageous, more just or simply more experienced in dealing with the vicissitudes of life. Literature, if it accomplishes anything for children, brings about the enlargement of

their imaginations and an assurance that the limits of their own lives might be transcended:

the literary work...is a unique mode of experience, an expansion of the boundaries of our own temperaments and worlds, lived through in our own persons. (Rosenblatt, 1978: 68)

Intersubjective worlds and the value of acting

Rachel's focus on the intersubjective aspects of *The Seven Ravens* is also expressed in a range of references to relationships between the heroine, her parents and brothers which at times include their emotions:

Rachel	...she snuck out and she didn't tell anyone no-one knew where she was and so she had to keep it a secret so...I thought that was quite nasty 'cause her parents must've felt really upset and they didn't know where she was but they must've assumed that she'd gone to find her brothers and that and they must've felt quite upset about what she's going to do and
Res	So why did she do that then how did she come to make that decision do you think?
Rachel	I think...'cause like her parents had never told her it was like a bit of a shock and she wanted to find out who they were...I think I would as well if I found out I had seven brothers I think I'd like to know and find out who they were

(interview 1.4.03: 296 - 308).

Like Gareth's use of the object-world of the story, Rachel seems to embed her discourse of value within those of relationships, self and emotions. The 'upset' and 'shock' of the parents are the backdrop against which the heroine acts here – an intersubjective world in which actions are not isolated, but merge with emotions and other-relations. Here the girl's actions are discussed in relation to their effects or consequences on others and in relation to Rachel's own world. Actions in the story for Gareth on the other hand, are integrated with the physical "world" of the text - they are part of its texture and tapestry. What unites their respective approaches, however, is the nature of acting itself – its value in the world of people and things.

### Wider patterns

These patterns can be observed more widely in the data I collected and I have commented on some of them in previous chapters. James's interest in the bullets from Maskew's gun in *Moonfleet* for example, might be compared with Anna's concern for John's friendship with Elzevir and his relationship with his Aunt Jane. Rachel's desire to give the Greedy Governor of the Lone Islands in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* a "second chance" might be compared to Darren's absorption with Caspian's army, the state of the men's armour and their fighting actions. Holly, so focused at times on the human heart, develops a discourse about the family in her responses to *The Seven Ravens*. Such examples lend some further support to the suggestion that boys and girls bring different insights to their discourses about fiction and to their approaches to the moral dimension of fiction.

### Transcending differences in freedom and love

However, this dichotomy of response is also transcended in the shared dialogue both Gareth and Rachel carried out with Holly. In this dialogue, the actions of the heroine of *The Seven Ravens* are subjected to severe moral scrutiny by the three children, a point I have already referred to in chapter 6. Beyond this, however, is the way in which the children's discourse – so focused on the girl's action of "running away" to find her seven brothers – is resolved spontaneously with reference to the question of value:

Holly	...she was only doing it 'cause she wanted to find her brothers
Gareth	It was love wasn't it that made her do it?
Rachel	Yeah
Holly	Yeah

(group discussion 26.3.03: 221 - 224).

For both Gareth and Rachel their deliberations are set within the context of the virtue of love to which they finally defer in evaluating the choices of the girl in the story. As



I suggested in chapter 6, this shared understanding of what motivates the girl in the story functions to integrate Gareth and Rachel's contrasting concerns at a different level than simply action or emotion. This is because love and freedom are intimately related:

*Freedom exists for the sake of love...it is by way of love that human beings share most fully in the good...The great moral force of love lies precisely in this desire for happiness, for the true good, of another person...Love is indeed the highest of the moral values. (Wojtyla, 1981: 135 - 139)*

The concept of the person

Despite the important differences in their responses which I have suggested above, what unites the children's understanding and evaluation is a shared sense of value that transcends immediate action and emotion. Discourses of action and emotion are both united and transcended by a discourse of value in which both children gain insight into the nature of the acting person that is more than just concrete or affective. Vygotskian abstraction or 'scientific thinking' - thinking with conscious, reflective awareness (Vygotsky, 1987: 190ff) - enriches their understanding of value here. It provides an important association between the incident in the text and the value of love that may form the basis of future responses and textual comprehension. In the case of both children, their interests are consistent with a growing ability to conceive of others as moral beings, that is, as persons - another hallmark of the moral imagination at work (Guroian, 2005: 55).

Complementary strategies

For boys and girls, the development of such awareness can be linked to such conscious and reflective activity through which the generalization of concepts takes place (Vygotsky, 1987: 190 - 191). For boys this may be especially important given the suggestion by Ofsted that boys tend to make quick, superficial answers to questions

in English and need time to think and reflect before doing so (Ofsted, 2003: 31). Memory and emotion clearly have a role to play in this process as I suggested earlier in the chapter; perhaps for both sexes complementary strategies need employing in the classroom to engage the memories and emotions of boys and the ability to abstract details of the physical “worlds” of fictional texts. As it is also clear that gender imbalances can diminish in classrooms where boys and girls work together in pairs or small groups (Ofsted, 1993: 15, Ofsted, 2003: 31ff), boys and girls may have important insights to give each other about the acting person within a discourse of value as mediated through fiction.

Who do I want to be like?

As I have argued earlier in this chapter, one of the potential consequences of this kind of engagement with fiction – an engagement that is by its very nature active – is that:

In turning towards...ends, objects, and values...I cannot help but also in my conscious activity turn towards myself as an end, for I cannot relate to different objects of activity and choose different values without thereby determining myself (thus becoming the primary object for myself as a subject) and my own value. (Wojtyła, 1976: 230)

So with Rachel, the turn to herself in comparing herself to the girl in *The Seven Ravens* is essentially a kind of reflection upon her own values (sometimes ‘horrible’ or ‘nasty’ to others) that once again raises Bettelheim’s (1975: 10) question for the child, ‘who do I want to be like?’ As an intellectual and imaginative process, responding to the girl-protagonist’s actions in the story also poses a challenge to both children. In providing memorable images for both Rachel and Gareth through the reflective function of consciousness, such discourses of value become part of their memories and part of their experience of the possibilities of personhood and moral acting in the world.

## 10.10 Summary and conclusions

### A complex process

Drawing on the phenomenological anthropology of Karol Wojtyla (1976, 1979, 1981), I have presented an interpretation of the interaction between children and the moral dimension of fiction. I have used the term moral rehearsal for this process and have consistently suggested that it constitutes a mode of reading experience, one which can develop as a result of the experience itself (Protherough, 1983: 21). I have essentially presented this as an answer to my initial research questions about the moral imagination. That is, that children's engagement with the moral dimensions of fiction allows them to develop their moral imaginations by a complex process of interaction with texts that is situated within a classroom context which includes other pupils and me as teacher-researcher.

### The shape of experience

To describe this process more closely I have drawn on terms from the field of contemporary poetics and narratology (e. g. Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, Cohn, 2000), and have suggested that two forms of moral rehearsal take place – mimetic rehearsal and diegetic rehearsal – and that they provide both the context and the means for internalisation to take place within children's discourse. I also explained how I understand internalisation with regard to the ontological status of the subject as a person endowed with an interior life that is prior to culture though clearly deeply affected by it (Wojtyla, 1976, 1981). I also described processes of rehearsal that involve both the reflective and reflexive functions of consciousness in the child, both of which contribute to the shaping of the child's experience and of the child's subjectivity and self (Wojtyla, 1979).

### Active strategies of the imagination

Central to this process I identify aspects of their discourse by which alternative perspectives and moral attitudes are internalised in dialogue with others, including what Booth (1983) calls the implied author. In this way, I develop a phenomenological analysis of the moral imagination and the implied reader (Iser, 1989: 63). I have also argued that children use a range of active, participatory strategies in this process of imagination that enable them to make this interaction significant and personally meaningful. This is because the “reality” of the reading experience can illuminate basic patterns of real experience and in this sense, the literary text acts as a kind of “mirror” to experience (Iser, 1978: 281). By entering into the imaginative worlds of narrative, children experience the perspective of others. This is effected through the selection of moral touchstones, the creation of alternative narratives and by the dramatisation of character voices, thoughts and emotions. I have highlighted the special importance of memory and emotion in this process such that children’s future comprehension may be enhanced or supported alongside the enrichment of their moral imaginations.

### Gender discourses

In considering the influence of gender on the main findings, I described how previous findings have suggested that boys’ and girls’ reading choices become increasingly gender-specific as they enter adolescence (Hall and Coles, 1999). I also suggested that according to findings from previous school inspections, boys have more difficulty with the affective aspects of literature than girls and can benefit from time to think and reflect in the teaching of literature (e. g. Ofsted, 1993). In my analysis of two children’s responses to *The Seven Ravens* by the Brothers Grimm, I showed how discourses of feeling, relationship and action varied between two

children in the inquiry, Gareth and Rachel. I also suggested that they can be transcended by discourses of value in which the acting person can be seen within both “worlds” – that of physical things and that of other persons.

#### The benefits of participation

I further suggested that both of these are important for boys and girls to come to terms with in their lives, and that boys and girls have much to learn from each other’s approaches to fiction. I also suggested that the place of the reading subject in relation to such discourses is important because of the reflective and reflexive functions of consciousness by which fiction is mediated in participation with others. More classroom collaboration between boys and girls might benefit both in their handling of literature as a whole, but also in their response to the moral dimension of fiction and in the development of their moral imaginations. I turn in the next chapter to the relationship between these findings, the moral imagination and contemporary approaches to reading and literacy.

## Chapter 11

### A modest proposal: Literacy and the moral imagination

‘Literacy opens possibilities to the word and to human existence.’

Ong (1982: 175)

#### 11.1 Introduction

Literacy as praxis

In order to bring this thesis towards a conclusion, I would like in this chapter to propose that literacy – which includes children’s reading and response – is deeply concerned with the nature of the human person. I would also like to propose that literacy, as the subject of *praxis*, is implicated in the realisation of the human person within different communities and cultural contexts. It may be considered, I suggest, a way of being and acting in the world that both reflects and shapes the rich inheritance of human culture:

At a deeper level, literacy is fundamental to education because the ability to use written language to derive and convey meaning is fundamental to contemporary culture and thinking. The teaching of literacy is about one generation equipping the next with a powerful cultural tool. (Hannon, 2000: 8)

I therefore outline five propositions or hypotheses that I consider implications of this research into children’s response to fiction and the moral imagination. In order to explore these in relation to some contemporary approaches to literacy and reading, I begin with a brief discussion of the “dialectics of secularisation” (Schuller, 2006) and the need for dialogue and mutual understanding between broadly Western secular-liberal and religious understandings of reality. I then develop this in terms of a brief discussion of some current approaches to literacy. I suggest that such approaches to literacy now appear to be divided by competing epistemologies that reflect quite

different conceptions of the nature of the person and of reality. This difference concerns,

the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are. (Lewis, 1943a: 16)

A modest proposal

Literacy, I would suggest, as a field of human endeavour and research is no different from other related fields such as anthropology or sociology in its adoption of specific assumptions of what it means to be human. This is partly because most theories of literature and the humanities are more or less concealed theories of the nature of the person and of what constitutes the ‘good society’ or the ‘good of society’ (Edwards, 1986: 10). My own presentation of moral rehearsal as an aspect of literacy located within the study of children’s literary experience and childhood has suggested how reading fiction may contribute to shaping children’s moral and spiritual values. The shaping of children’s views of the world has also, more recently, become the focus of new movements within literacy and education:

Literacy is often associated with radical political goals – to do with demands for democratic rights and power. The fact that written language can be such a powerful tool means that the question of who should be able to use it, and what they should use it for, has always been deeply political. (Hannon, 2000: 6)

In examining some aspects of these new movements, I make a “modest proposal” about the role of literacy in enabling the imagination to initiate children into moral and spiritual values:

to go beyond all the confines of the various kinds of utilitarianism and discover within the full richness of human praxis its deep relation to truth, goodness, and beauty, a relation that has a disinterested – pure and nonutilitarian – character. (Wojtyla, 1989: 270)

### Five propositions

This proposal consists of five hypotheses that follow from the inquiry I have outlined in the previous chapters:

1. Moral rehearsal as a mode of children's response to fiction can initiate the imagination into spiritual and moral values.
2. Children participate in moral rehearsal as moral witnesses to the "portrayed worlds" of fiction.
3. Literacy has a role to play in developing children's consciousness of the moral and spiritual dimension of the person;
4. Literacy is therefore important in mediating the contact of "authoritative communities" with moral and spiritual values.
5. Moral and spiritual questions of existential significance to children and childhood should therefore be included in literacy discourse, theory and research.

I begin my discussion of this final and central proposition by considering the need for dialogue amongst different theoretical and ethical traditions in relation to literacy and reading.

## **11.2 Dialectics of secularisation: The need for dialogue**

### Essential values

As a literacy educator, I would suggest that children's reading of fiction should continue to have an important place in the development of a society that 'respects human dignity' (Habermas, 2006: 32) because fiction, as a form of culture, can mediate "essential" human values such as justice and courage through the work of educating the moral imagination. Throughout this thesis I have endeavoured to demonstrate the importance of reading fiction to children's moral and spiritual development within the English classroom. In doing so, I have drawn upon – broadly



speaking – the Western metaphysical tradition of ethics and culture. I recognise however, that other traditions exist and that today's society in the West consists of a plurality of cultures, worldviews and religious traditions. What Habermas refers to as 'political liberalism' (*ibid.*: 24), especially, would renounce the assumptions of classical and religious theories of natural law such as I presented in chapter 2 and from which I have sometimes drawn during my analysis of data in chapters 6-10.

Solidarity, justice and the common good

Despite this, as Habermas (2006) points out, contemporary liberal societal structures such as those of schools are dependent upon the solidarity of their citizens in acting for the common good and common interests (*ibid.*: 22, 30). These in turn require 'political virtues' anchored in 'ethical programmes of living' drawn from different cultural ways of life (30). Such 'communicative praxis' and solidarity with the common good is very much in keeping with the Catholic tradition of 'participation', by which man perfects himself as a social being in community with others oriented towards the common good:

the human *we*, in its various dimensions, signifies a human multiplicity with the kind of structure in which the person as a subject is maximally actualized...participation... is... a property by virtue of which human beings tend...towards self-fulfillment and fulfil themselves by acting and existing together with others. (Wojtyla, 1976: 251, 254)

Such solidarity between persons and communities arises when 'principles of justice have penetrated more deeply into the complex of ethical orientations of a given culture' (Habermas, 2006: 33). Fiction, as I have suggested throughout this thesis, is one way in which this may happen in children's lives; it is not the only way, nor does it occur without pre-existing ethical contexts and the mediation of teachers and peers,

and these may differ somewhat between communities and cultures. However, it is surely

in the interests of the constitutional state to deal carefully with all the cultural sources that nourish its citizens' consciousness of norms and their solidarity. (Habermas, 2006: 46)

This awareness, for Habermas, is reflected in the phrase “postsecular society” and of the many sources of cultural life in such a society, I have suggested that children’s reading of fiction can have a role in such nourishment. Some, such as Hauerwas (1981: 270) have even suggested that ‘the novel remains our most distinctive form of moral instruction’.

#### Intercultural dialogue

It is important to recognise therefore, that in the discussion that follows – of, in general, some secular and political-liberal approaches to literacy and reading – I recognise the important foundations of human rights for justice and ‘self-subsistent values’ implicit within this tradition (Ratzinger, 2006: 60). Although I am critical of relativistic approaches to truth and knowledge, I recognise that different positions are possible between the poles of faith, reason, realism and relativism. An ‘intercultural’ dialogue about rights, obligations and the limitations of faith and reason (Ratzinger, 2006: 72) is, in my view, necessary in today’s pluralistic society and in one sense, this thesis and the discussion that follows is a contribution to this. Later, I return to the importance of different traditions and “authoritative communities” to this process and the process of children’s reading. As literacy educators involved in both theory and practice, we should surely strive to attain,

a genuine relatedness to...other cultures...a polyphonic relatedness in which they themselves are receptive to the essential complementarity of reason and faith, so that a universal process of purifications (in the plural!) can proceed. Ultimately, the essential values and norms that are in some way known and

sensed by all...will take on a new brightness in such a process. (Ratzinger, 2006: 79 – 80)

### 11.3 Literacy, language and the politics of representation

Encountering self and other

In the various new and critical literacies<sup>5</sup> which I discuss further below, readers and writers – and I include children in this – envision a world of truths that they create, as opposed to discovering and entering into a world of objective value and truth. One reason for this is a contemporary view of language as *primarily* epistemic or truth-creating such that texts cannot speak truly about the world, only about other texts (Edwards, 1986: 103). Language, however, operates epistemologically in more than one way; it also,

makes the self knowable in terms explicit to itself and to others; it is the means by which consciousness discerns and negotiates perception...Reading thus becomes an activity which permits both self-reflection and self-transcendence, making possible an even deeper encounter with another self or mind. (Edwards, 1986: 104)

In chapter 10, I argued that children's responses to fiction offer a means for precisely this kind of 'encounter' with self and other. Through moral rehearsal, children reflect upon moral and spiritual values and participate in a form of reflexion that enlarges their sense of self and consciousness, shaping it according to a discourse of value.

Epistemology, childhood and the interpersonal

Other important issues are at stake in the advent of "new literacies", however. First is the possibility of genuine knowledge or "truth" in the humanities, since all humane

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<sup>5</sup> Helpful summaries of critical, ethnographic and socio-cultural approaches to literacy can be found in Kamil (2000: 141ff, 153ff, 196ff).

studies are founded on the valid interpretation of texts (Hirsch, 1967: viii - ix).

Secondly, our understanding of the nature of the human person:

The new literacies constructed in contemporary...theory...conflate the depth and complexity of personhood with an exaggerated and radically autonomous conception of individual human consciousness. (Edwards, 1986: 105)

The loss of the notion of objective reality or value sometimes appears in contemporary conceptions of literacy – the very standpoint that enables us to acknowledge the limitations of our own viewpoints and to recognise our constructs of reality as constructs.

Literacy as ecology

Barton's (1994) ecological conception of literacy, for example, shows how such questions about the image of the person and the functions of language soon arise in the context of new literacies. Barton (1994: 11ff) suggests that literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon largely dependent for its discourse upon founding metaphors such as disease, skills or empowerment. Differing in what they emphasise, he suggests that all views of literacy have language at the centre though for Barton, as for others (e. g. Bruner, 1986: 96, Watkins, 1992: 176, 181, Hunt, 1999: 3), language as a product of thought constructs reality – and therefore 'reading is deconstructing' – and literacy has a primarily social meaning (Barton 1994: 17-19). Barton's own metaphor for literacy is itself interesting and reveals his implicit conception of the person and language. This is the metaphor of "ecology", drawn from biology, in which man is an "organism" interacting with an "environment":

An ecological approach takes as its starting-point...interaction between individuals and their environments...an ecological approach aims to understand how literacy is embedded in other human activity, its embeddedness in social life and thought, and its position in history, language and learning. (Barton, 1994: 29 - 32)

New terms like ‘diversity’ and ‘ecosystem’ become further metaphors by which this interaction can be studied with the aim of uncovering the particulars of the cultural construction of literacy practices and events (36-37). Literacy, as a ‘set of social practices associated with particular symbol systems and their related technologies’ (32) is therefore embedded in the particular, especially in observed uses of literacy within cultures. As part of the way people think about and represent the world, literacy events and practices take on a role in uncovering power relations between individuals because:

All thought is socially constructed, and it is the social practices around literacy, not literacy itself, which shape consciousness. (Barton, 1994: 47)

#### Naturalistic values

The image of man implicit in Barton’s epistemology however, appears to be essentially naturalistic. Literacy, in the ecological model, may therefore be closed to the transcendent in man, to the ways in which literacy practices may enable or disable children’s access to higher and objective moral and spiritual values. If reality is “socially constructed” by language as a product of thought, then so is the notion of value which must remain a form of social construct:

If there are no absolutes...society can...construct any values it pleases and is itself subject to none. (Veith, 1994: 159)

As a touchstone for culture, literacy could become trapped in its own ecosystem and any adaptation or co-operation that takes place between cultures, societies or groups would only be forms of ‘meaning quest’ (Barton, 1994: 182), not encounters with objective value or reality. Cultural identity, for Barton, seems to be determined by ecological validity rather than the nature of the human person or,

the unity of the human condition and its common experience of contact with a truth that is greater than we are. (Ratzinger, 2004a: 79)

### The ideological turn

Similar questions about the person, as well as the place of the imagination and its relation to meaning arise within Street's (1984, 1995) accounts of literacy in theory and practice. For Street (1984:1), literacy is embedded in ideology and the specific ideology that forms much of the implicit subject of his own critique of traditional approaches to literacy is what he calls 'autonomous literacy'. This is a narrow culture-specific form of literacy he sees as mainly concerned with economic supply and demand for cognitive skills. Broadly speaking, this is associated in his account with twentieth century Western literacy. His 'ideological model' by contrast focuses on literacy as 'social practice' that is, like Barton's model, ideologically and culturally embedded. In this model, socialisation processes are significant in the meaning of literacy for participants but these processes, being ideologically embedded, are not neutral but may express the 'hegemony of a ruling class' (2-3).

### Culture and content

The important advantage of this model is that it acknowledges the role of wider, ideological frameworks or worldviews in literacy practice itself and emphasises the importance – like Vygotsky (1987) – of culture in the formation of the human person. However, the question of textual meaning is never far away in Street's accounts, nor is the question of the human person. By focusing on what Ratzinger (2004b: 63, 67) calls 'makability' – the uses and practices of literacy events – it should not be forgotten that literacy has to have objective content. Without content – which is not the same thing as practice or event – literacy would cease to exist as a means of encountering and interacting with the objective nature of the world. With reference to

the acquisition of writing and Cole and Scribner's (1981) study of Vai literacy in Liberia, for example:

we should not expect it to result in greater 'fixity', 'objectivity' or 'truth'...the relation of literacy to 'truth' is as equivocal as that of orality. (Street, 1984: 102, 122)

If this is so, then the possibility that there is an unequivocal relationship between literacy, the word and objective truth becomes difficult to sustain. The word, which 'illuminates consciousness with articulate language' (Ong, 1982: 179), can easily become subordinate to the association of literacy with oppressive moral codes and forms of social control. Referring to Graff's (1979) account of literacy in nineteenth century Canada *The Literacy Myth* for example, he observes that,

...particular approved forms of literacy were employed by a particular class as socialising agents for particular oppressed groups and as a means of imparting to them a specific moral code. (Street, 1984: 105)

Cultural construction and the loss of moral drama

This raises the question as to whether norms for the moral imagination such as justice, truth and love are relative concepts (i. e. to time, place or culture) or whether they have authentic, objective content accessible to the human person. In the absence of the latter, literature as an expression of values for the moral imagination may then become, like all other culturally situated literacies, a cultural construct with no relationship to the notion of "objective value" as Lewis (1943a) defines it.

It seems to me that the "ideological premise" concerning cultural construction makes it potentially more difficult to distinguish between the objective, ideological contents of different literacy practices and events, especially in the moral domain. Objective moral and spiritual values lose their essential drama – a drama so insistent in the

children's responses to fiction in this study - when they are conceptualised as cultural or social constructs as opposed to objectively real. The moral drama of fiction itself could easily become inaccessible, except in so far as it is constructed according to time, place or person. As I suggested in chapter 2, however, the meaning of good and evil cannot be contrived, only acknowledged as a dramatic conflict at the centre of human existence (*Gaudium et Spes* 1965: 13).

#### Critical literacy and social justice

Other expressions of what are sometimes called “critical literacies” also appear to take a similar position in relation to the notion of objective value. Critical literacy practices, including functional and critical interaction with texts, focus on the ideologically situated nature of literacy and the fostering of political awareness and social change (Larson and Marsh, 2005: 45). Central to this broadly “emancipatory” project again, are particular notions of the human person and the nature of language. Key themes of “critical literacy” include the liberation of disenfranchised groups according to race, gender or sexuality. This is to be achieved through the medium of an ideologically engaged literacy that documents ‘resistant practices’ (51) for the purposes of social change and ‘social justice’ (46). For Larson and Marsh (2005) for example, answering back, scepticism and the rejection of certain forms of authority inform a wide range of literacy approaches that aim to foster,

a critical approach to curriculum design and pedagogy...[and] commitments to wider social issues, such as gender, gay rights, racial and religious intolerance, care for refugees or the war against poverty. (Larson and Marsh, 2005: 64)

Critical literacy advocates typically present their project as aiming to enhance children's critical thinking skills through curricula and pedagogy that will provide ‘an appropriate education for a socially just society...in a rapidly changing world’ (Larson



and Marsh, 2005: 67). What constitutes a ‘socially just society’ however? Clearly, this would depend upon what image of the human person was to form the basis of such a society. For Larson and Marsh, literacy appears to be primarily a force for political and social change rather than a means to initiate children into essential moral and spiritual values.

#### Political enfranchisement

To illustrate this further, I draw upon several other key theorists in the field who conceptualise critical literacy as education committed to using literacy ‘for social change, cultural diversity, economic equity, and political enfranchisement’ (Luke, 1997: 1). According to Luke, literacy problems cannot be constructed around notions of ‘lack’ or ‘impoverishment’ but concern a range of social forces that need redirecting (2). Governments for example, tend to impose models of literacy upon schools – *English for ages 5 to 16* (DES, 1989a) and *The National Literacy Strategy for England and Wales* (DfEE, 2001) being prime examples – models which encode assumptions about both the technology and content of literacy practices.

#### Ecotechnical man

For Luke, the basis of these literacies is primarily economic and from this perspective children and school students thus become the victims of an economic system that situates them merely as consumers of a hegemonic literacy bound up with the politics of representation, identity and knowledge (Luke, 1997: 7). The problem with this view, despite its attractive motivation, is that it is predicated on an attempt to inculcate a particular vision of man in society:

The challenge of a political analysis of literacy in postmodern conditions is to move past Cartesian models of citizens as free wills and ‘class-conscious’ mentalities, beyond Fordist models of students and workers as carriers of ‘skills’, ‘competencies’, and ‘abilities’...and to move toward a reconsideration

of human subjects as ecotechnical embodied subjects...in an emergent information order that brings to bear a new set of contingent factors...about how to live relationally in an era of cultural juxtaposition. (Luke, 1997: 11)

The search for post-Cartesian man described here could be seen as an attempt to bring about a new society in which ‘ecotechnical’ man becomes the embodiment of ‘how to live’.

#### Situated meanings

This view of literacy – what might be called a kind of utopianism or the expression of what Kilpatrick (1992: 208ff) refers to as ‘the idyllic imagination’ – is, I would suggest, partly a laudable and practical attempt to deal with the inequalities and injustices of contemporary society. It endeavours to re-enchant in the face of what some might perceive as the disenchantment of contemporary Western industrialism that I referred to in chapter 1. Critical conceptions of literacy tend to find strength in creating apparent intellectual distance from their subjects, isolating worldviews and identities as ‘distinct forms of spoken and written language conveying situated meanings and cultural models’ (Gee, 2000: 195). Cultures however – as I argued in chapter in chapter 2 – although different, are also ‘the form of expression of the one being man, [and] are marked by the dynamics of man, which transcends all boundaries’:

all...cultures...present themselves in language. In all of them, the words of men become bearers of God’s own utterance, of his own Logos...[there is a] universal tendency of great cultures, their transcending of time and space, and thus the forward impetus they impart to man’s being and to his highest capacities. (Ratzinger, 2004a: 195, 196 - 197)

#### Ontological presence

The role of conscience in this process – as I have argued before – is central to the faithful transmission of culture itself; imagination as an “organ of meaning” can be a bearer of tradition and a means by which the nature of the human person, his or her

ontological presence can be conveyed, particularly to the younger generation. I have argued that children's reading is not only an ideologically and culturally situated act: it can also be a transcendent act by which the child may encounter objective moral and spiritual values by entering into the drama of the moral life as it is mediated by the word.

#### Ethical norms

The fundamental issue for such “emancipatory pluralists” as Gee (2000), Luke (1997) or Patterson (1997) is their relationship to the question of ethical norms. The notion of “emancipation” itself involves an implicit moral principle or claim that certain power structures in society are unjust. But this itself implies an external standard of justice against which forms of injustice can be measured. Arguments about ‘which sets of capacities are required for participation in modern societies’ (Patterson, 1997: 350) are hard to resolve in the contemporary climate of relativism (to which I referred in chapters 1 and 2) and without recourse to such implicit standards. Texts themselves, no matter how much critical distance we envisage between them and readers, also do things to children, often in ways we cannot predict. In an attempt to instil a new personalism into contemporary society, it seems that ethical formation can now often only be posited within ‘a limited domain’ (Patterson, 1997: 346) in which readers may be taught ‘feminist or antiracist reading’ as a critical act designed to change children's behaviour (346 – 347). This new moralism, despite the rejection of ‘norms that demand moral transformation of the subject’ (346) appears to have its own moral goals for which literacy is the vehicle.

#### Norms and authority

As Chesterton (1994) once pointed out however, you cannot get rid of authority in education. By rejecting the notion of objective value, “emancipatory educators” like

Patterson, Luke and Gee may be offering different norms but norms which are at least as binding:

The educator drawing out is just as arbitrary and coercive as the instructor pouring in; for he draws out what he chooses. He decides in the child what shall be developed and what shall not be developed. He does not (I suppose) draw out the neglected faculty of forgery. He does not (so far at least) lead out, with timid steps, a shy talent for torture. (Chesterton, 1994: 142)

Critical literacy theorists, by choosing to ‘draw out’ predetermined readings of texts necessarily neglect others. By choosing to use literacy as a means to political and social enfranchisement, literacy educators should not lose sight of the role of the imagination in mediating essential moral and spiritual values to children.

#### **11.4 Childhood and the irreducible subject**

Deconstructing childhood

The education of the moral imagination is deeply problematic of course, if childhood itself is “socially constructed”. As Hunt (1999: 2) points out, it is now no longer taken for granted that children will read simply for pleasure and be entertained and instructed at the same time. Literature suggests Hunt (4), is only a useful concept if we want to educate children into a ‘particular kind of culture’ but culture itself is now both plural and multi-vocal in the West. Childhood, according to Hunt (4) is also not immune from a closer scrutiny of its cultural contexts:

Childhood ranges from place to place, from time to time...the way in which critics ‘construct’ childhood...is important. (Hunt, 1999: 4)

A similar view is expressed by Hollindale (1997: 77), who sees ‘childness’ as ‘extremely flexible...[and] historically, socially and culturally determined’. In an extended discussion of the work of Philip Pullman, he suggests that current trends for

what might be called “dark realism” in some children’s fiction (e. g. Pullman’s *Sally Lockhart* series) are a kind of “liberation” that reconstructs ‘fictive childhood’ by introducing children to death and sex, ‘freeing it from a protective voluntary censorship which is out of line with children’s knowledge and awareness’ (92). The object of this kind of “realistic” exposure is to “rescue” children from,

the fraudulent fictive reassurances of ‘happily ever after’ against children’s knowledge of an actual world in which injustice thrives and good people undeservedly die. (Hollindale, 1997: 93)

According to Hollindale, this kind of narrative is ‘dissident’, subverting “norms” which he clearly rejects.

#### The criticism of disenchantment

Central to this is a straightforward attack on traditional notions of morality, specifically those associated with religion. Terms such as ‘out of line’, ‘fraudulent’ and ‘fictive’ reveal Hollindale’s own attachment to a particular view of what constitutes “real”. A strongly ethical term, ‘fraudulent’ implies that children - presumably in the past or perhaps within the unstated presence of a Christian past - have been “tricked” into thinking that love and justice are objectively real and can be a part of their everyday experience. Children, according to Hollindale, need disabusing of this notion and of the notion that goodness and justice can transcend ordinary life and can even transcend death. However, the existence of injustice and the death of ‘good people’ (although a reality) are assertions, not arguments for the absence of objective justice in the world. Whether or not reality is ontologically good remains open to question.

The issue raised by such a “criticism of disenchantment” is whether childhood itself has any permanent, universal and normative features. This question reappears

elsewhere in some trends in contemporary criticism of children's literature. In arguing against the concept of "identification" for example, Lesnik-Oberstein (1994: 110ff, 1999: 25 - 26) suggests that it is a concept which is dependent upon definitions of children and childhood. He suggests that as a concept it relies upon the assumption of an 'essential child' recognisable by readers – especially child readers as in some way "real". Without this "real child", he argues that children's literature criticism has no reason to exist and that the notion of children's identity as having an objective relationship to reading is a 'Romantic' assumption (1994: 114).

#### The loss of the personal subject

Once the child is deconstructed in this way however, the possibility that reading is an affective and imaginative activity with important relationships to the development of culture become problematic. The ontological disruption of childhood – of children's capacity for empathy, imagination and self-transcendence – leads to more profound difficulties of a metaphysical nature. This is because the loss of an "essential child" or to any sense that childhood has permanent norms associated with it also leads to the loss of any objective moral or spiritual bearings for both childhood and adulthood because the one (childhood) leads inexorably to the other (adulthood). Accompanying this is the loss of the personal subject as the irreducible in man:

the irreducible...[is what] is unique and unrepeatable in each human being, by virtue of which he or she is not just *a particular human being* – an individual of a certain species – but *a personal subject*...The irreducible signifies that which is essentially incapable of reduction, that which cannot be reduced but can only be *disclosed* or *revealed*. *Lived experience essentially defies reduction*. (Wojtyla, 1988: 214 - 215)

In the research I have presented in this thesis, it is clear that children themselves recognise important distinctions between good and evil in their discussion of the moral virtues. As lived experience, I would suggest that the qualities of their

responses to fiction cannot always be reduced to forms of “social construction”. As I argued in chapter 10, they are the expressions of the lived experience of personal subjects – experience that “*essentially defies reduction*”, despite the influence of others upon it.

## 11.5 The place of authoritative communities

### Distinct perspectives

In my discussion of new and critical literacies, I have focused on the relationship between literacy and the question of objective or “essential” values in some new approaches to literacy like those of Barton (1994, 1998) and Street (1984, 1995). Whilst I have identified what I consider some potential difficulties with their approaches, I recognise that despite these difficulties they offer their own distinct perspectives to the debate about the future of children’s reading and literacy. Where narrative fiction is concerned, new and ‘multiliteracies’ (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000a) would agree, I think, that both children and adults,

get from stories...an engagement on a deep and personal level with the lives and feelings of others...that is necessary to living. (Harrison, 2004: 23)

### Approaches to meaning

In this thesis I have focused on the kind of moral enrichment that fiction can offer to children; central to this has been the question of meaning. This is also a key feature of new approaches to literacy, along with for example learning to understand the overall architecture of texts, their social uses and dimensions in and out of school and to see how texts often represent particular worldviews (Larson and Marsh, 2005: 42 – 43)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> That this has a specifically moral dimension is clear, for example, from the notion of ‘transitivity’ which indicates how much agency and effect a writer designs into a sentence (*The New London Group*, 2000: 28).

As part of wider, liberal-political approach to education, new and multiliteracies, like any approach (including the one offered in this thesis), must rely upon a shared ‘communicative praxis’ (Habermas, 2006: 32) – for example, such as that offered by The New London Group (2000) - to provide ethical and political goals and reference points for present and future action:

Rather than fall prey to the forces of fragmentation and destructive divergence, schools need to work with a new ethics and a new pragmatism: the ethics and pragmatism of pluralism, of divergencies that complement each other and that in their diversity create new and productive interrelationships. (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000b: 147)

The awareness of the possibility of postmodern ‘fragmentation’ shown here seems to acknowledge a need for ethical boundaries and norms – in this case those of pluralism and pragmatism - the position of one community of practice in relation to norms for both schooling and ultimately, literacy.

#### Learning and identity

As I have suggested before, the norms created by the presence of such “authoritative communities” should be considered important for children’s lives more widely, but also for the practice of literacy and reading. This is because “authoritative communities” like those of educators, parents, civic, cultural or religious groups can also provide important models of what it means to be a good person (*The Commission on Children at Risk*, 2003). Reading and responding to fiction, as I have suggested, is one way in which such communities can effect this. Children’s search for meaning and purpose can be stimulated and enriched by the kinds of discussions and dialogues found in this thesis as well as by approaches suggested by some advocates of new literacies as central to the process of identity formation. The starting point for such new literacy pedagogies is,



the situated selves of learners, the starting point of a transformation that does not leave those selves behind in the fashion of assimilation, but which recognises and builds upon those selves. (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000: 147)

This, it seems to me, is what moral rehearsal is essentially about – that shaping of children’s consciousness under the critical mediation of teachers and peers within “authoritative communities” of meaning and purpose.

#### Narrative and authoritative communities

I have consistently drawn attention to how this process has a moral and even spiritual dimension connected to the idea that the child, like the adult, is always a *viator* – on the way to his or her becoming-in-the-world. I suggested in chapter 1 that this is helped by taking place within the particulars of a living tradition or “authoritative community”. This is because of the value-laden quality of narrative itself,

each story has a distinctive potential...it has been made intentionally. Powers of a rich but determinate kind have been “packed in” by the act of the teller and by the value-packed history of the language in its intention-ridden culture...values are at stake in our encounter with any work that works. (Booth, 1988: 92-93)

In chapter 2, I further suggested that children also learn about roles and expectations this way and that narrative can assist them in this process. The connectedness provided by families and other “authoritative communities” of meaning and purpose can be supported and inspired by the way stories can mediate a sense of meaning, a sense of what matters in the nature of our moral choices.

In chapter 9, I considered how the competing claims for normativity and significance made by stories for the attraction of children’s emotions also need the support and reinforcement of “authoritative communities”. In the realisation or transformation of

imagined identities, children's explorations and evaluations of narrative character benefit from the mediating influence of peers and others in communities where meaning is central to the narrative enterprise. Moral rehearsal requires the guidance and participation of such communities in making distinctions between what leads to a more deeply penetrated justice and ethical orientation in children's lives, and what does not. What I have referred to earlier as 'communicative praxis' (Habermas, 2006: 32) is not the sole province of one pedagogical or ethical community, but a responsibility shared by all who are interested in children's lives and development.

#### The crucible of culture

As I have suggested, some critical literacy theorists and children's literature critics like Hollindale (to whom I referred briefly above) wish to liberate children from "oppressive" ideologies by making them aware of their influence in texts – an aim that is certainly laudable enough and which I support. Children however, attach themselves vigorously and freely to the heroes and heroines of literary texts - texts that embody a range of ideological worldviews. Their acute sense of the moral drama of stories often appears to supersede the kind of critical distance advocated by some critical literacy theorists; emotional entanglement and imaginative participation flow quite naturally from their encounters with texts. The question remains of course, as to which ideologies should be considered "oppressive" in this process and why. Because of this, "authoritative communities" of teachers and parents have an important role to play in children's deliberations on "who they want to be like" in the stories they read. Consciousness, formed in the crucible of culture, needs the imagination as a medium of exchange; it also, I would suggest, needs the playfulness attendant upon moral rehearsal to ensure a hearing that in this world good and evil do exist and that we are always obliged to choose sides.

### The work of imagination

The analogies and metaphors of the moral imagination, so richly illustrated by the children's responses in previous chapters, suggest an important role for what I have called moral rehearsal in the development of the reading process and the development of culture. Without nurture, the moral imagination cannot develop the capacity to engage reality at the level of the symbolic:

What constitutes human culture and distinguishes it from the beehive or wolf pack are images and symbolic articulations that interpret reality, including, inevitably, images of religious and transcendent signification. Human culture is itself the product...of ultimate questions raised by countless generations of humanity. (Guroian, 2005: 75)

If culture is principally the work of imagination as I suggested in chapter 4, literature has an important role to play in shaping culture. Children's minds and imaginations need the guidance of teachers, parents and what I have referred to as "authoritative communities" to safeguard the transmission of an authentic moral and spiritual culture that derives its basis from the recognition that the person is a moral and spiritual being.

### Existential confrontation

Clearly, praxis is both constituted through culture as well as constituting culture itself and in the classroom, fiction has the potential to contribute to a process of 'existential confrontation' (Wojtyla, 1989: 272). However, literature should not be confused with philosophy, ethics or theology and should not be expected to play the same role in culture, nor influence the character of children's growing imaginations in quite the same way. Its authority, if it has any, is derivative and this needs remembering in any attempt to erect a theory of what happens when children (or adults) read. The imagination, as what Lewis (1939: 265) called an 'organ of meaning' does not function

in isolation from reason as the children's many responses to fiction in this study demonstrate. It does need nurture however, and in the next section I offer some reflections on the moral imagination and the selection of reading material by parents and teachers.

## 11.6 Implications for teaching and learning

### Alternate worlds

The texts I selected for use in the classroom such as *Moonfleet* and *The Pearl*, and that form the basis of the children's dialogues I collected, are good examples of stories with strong "alternate worlds", highly affective dimensions and aesthetically well-crafted plots. These are all features of fiction that adolescents enjoy (both boys and girls) and that enable strong personal involvement, identification and interpretation (Appleyard, 1991: 101ff). Perhaps most importantly however, they all contain strong moral drama with a clear sense of an ethical scale 'in the background' of the story (Kilpatrick, 1994: 36). In this sense, they invite response to moral drama as it is enacted by the imagination in reading.

### Re-enchantment

Fairy tales like *The Seven Ravens* may be especially effective material for engaging children's moral response and moral imagination. This is because, as I suggested in chapter 10, they appeal to both sexes and present imaginary worlds in which clear moral norms co-exist with human freedom and self-determination:

the world of fairy-tales is a brighter and more varied world than ours...it is brighter and more varied because it is more moral...fairy-tales [can] be enjoyed because they are moral, but morality can be enjoyed because it puts us into fairyland, in a world at once of wonder and of war. (Chesterton, 2005: 8 - 9)

The importance of “other worlds” is one also recommended by Benton (1983: 69 - 70, 1992: 22ff), whose “secondary world” hypothesis is derived from Tolkien’s own account of fairy tales that strongly emphasises the power to story to re-enchant the world through the recovery and consolation of meaning (Tolkien, 1947: 37, 58ff).

#### Norms and limits

In the classroom and at home, teachers and parents need to think carefully about the material on offer to children. Not all uses of the imagination are necessarily good or benign (Guroian, 2005: 56ff); what matters I would suggest, is what uses of the imagination is put to and what uses of the imagination we wish to encourage in our children. If story has the potential to shape consciousness itself, mediating moral and spiritual values then teachers and parents need to think carefully about the “ethical scale” offered to children by different authors. Does it, for example, offer ethical norms consistent with the dignity of the person and with the notion that the person exists in a world ‘in which there are norms and limits, a world in which freedom respects the moral law or pays an especially high price’ (Guroian, 2005: 61)?

#### Over-prescription

Stories such as C. S Lewis’ *Narnia Chronicles* respect these norms and embody them in memorable and imaginative “other worlds” in which human freedom is often subject to the violence of others, but retains its dignity because of the existence of transcendent values upon which the person is founded. Some commentators like O’Brien (1998: 86) have attempted to provide guidelines for choosing between the material of fiction, dividing the material up into ‘good’, somewhat ‘disordered’, ‘fundamentally disordered’ and ‘blatantly evil’. Although this can be helpful to some, there is a danger in this kind of prescription that some literature which can speak eloquently to children may be consigned to the “rotten” category when in fact it may

awaken unexpected moral and spiritual responses. As I have shown in chapters 6 – 9, children’s responses to the moral dimension of fiction are varied and unpredictable and often depend on their own prior understanding of moral categories.

#### The formation of conscience

What is of great importance in this process, as I have suggested, is the presence of “authoritative communities” – teachers and parents with whom children can discuss their reading and its implications for moral and spiritual formation. I think O’Brien is quite correct however, when he points out that,

Children are especially vulnerable to the power of images, precisely because they are at the stage of development when their fundamental categories of reality are being formed. Their perceptions and understanding are being shaped at every moment...through a ceaseless ingathering of words and images. (O’Brien, 1998: 61)

This susceptibility places a special responsibility upon parents and teachers for the formation of children’s image of the human person and the associated formation of conscience. As a Catholic educator I have suggested that it is the personalistic norm or the commandment to love (Wojtyla, 1981: 40ff) that should be at the heart of this process and children need opportunities to discuss their reading in relation to this. Those from other traditions will find their own or similar ways to explore the question of values with children and to discuss their reading in relation to this.

#### The hunger for meaning

The excitement of reading and responding to fiction, in my view, can be significantly enhanced for children who engage in a discourse of value about their reading. This is because of children’s hunger for meaning:

a child’s hunger for literature (visual or printed) is his [sic] quest for a more ‘real’ world. He needs to know what is truly heroic in simple, memorable

terms. He needs to see the hidden foundations of his world. (O'Brien, 1998: 72)

This search for permanent meaning amidst what is fleeting and temporary is what can give the reading of fiction its excitement; the discovery that you are not alone and that the world, for all its incompleteness, makes sense.

## **11.7 Limitations of this study**

### Researcher interests

Clearly this study has confined within which it was conducted. My approach is based upon a Catholic and Christian understanding of the world and of others within it. It is also informed by my experiences as a father, an English teacher and a student of childhood and literature. As such, my interests are at once ethical, psychological and literary. Researchers from different theoretical backgrounds and with different perspectives upon both fiction and the moral life might also fruitfully explore this area. As Piaget once pointed out,

if other[s]...take up our questions from different viewpoints...it will be possible sooner or later to separate the objective from the arbitrary elements in the results we bring forward. (Piaget, 1932: viii)

Despite its “substantive” nature, the notion of moral rehearsal as a mode of reading response remains a ‘working hypothesis’ (Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 38) that awaits further investigation and comparison with other cases of children.

### Strengths and weaknesses

Many of the other assertions and generalisations I have made therefore, must be considered tentative or ‘fuzzy generalisation’ (Stake, 1995, Bassey, 2003, Bassey and Pratt, 2003) that can be compared to other populations of children responding to

fiction. Drawn from “naturalistic” settings they retain the limitations inherent within them – researcher preoccupations, small sampling of numbers of pupils of limited ages and of particular social backgrounds. However, it could be argued as I suggested in chapter 4, that these contextual factors are the very basis for such an inquiry’s strengths – the particularity and depth of art – the kind that can perhaps only be achieved by case study (Stake, 1995, 2000 Eisner, 1998).

#### Further developments

With a small number of pupils, it is only possible to reveal what they can do; what other pupils might be able to do in other, similar circumstances awaits further inquiry. It seems to me, however, that the strategies I have described appear well-grounded enough to merit further reflection and inquiry. They are also a development of previous conceptualisations of reader response (e. g. Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978, Harding, 1967, 1977, Benton, 1983, 1992, 1999) and to the understanding of the interaction of children with fiction. With further time and a more detailed analysis it is possible I could have extended the range of “fuzzy generalisations” – for example, concerning gender. I have also included relatively little reference to pupils’ written work or to children’s drawings, their relation to reading response nor to their re-reading of stories, features of reading still relatively un-researched (Petrosky, 1985).

#### Schools, families and children’s social lives

Whilst retaining an interest like Coles (1986a, 1989, 1990) in children’s moral lives more widely, I have made little systematic attempt to connect their responses to fiction to their wider social lives in the playground, at home or elsewhere. Further research is needed about this as well as about the important influence of family literacy practices (such as those described by Purcell-Gates, 2000) on children’s responses to the moral dimension of fiction and on the development of their moral



imaginations. School-wide policies, school ethos and approach to children's moral and spiritual development might also be considered a factor in this kind of children's response to fiction. Further research is certainly needed about the importance of this to children's moral lives as a whole and to their response to fiction.

## **11.8 Suggestions for further research**

### Unexplored directions

In an inquiry of this kind, no manuscript is ever really complete (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 253). In an effort to allow my readers to 'see for themselves' (Wolcott, 1994: 350) I have opted for a balance between too little and too much detail in the hope that I will have been candid enough and balanced enough to enhance the validity of the project. Inevitably, as a thesis, I present a perspective which is both personal and yet concerned with issues of general and, as I have argued, wider significance for children's experience of literature and the development of culture. Inevitably however, I have left some avenues relatively unexplored and others undeveloped, just hinted at or suggested by my analysis, presentation and interpretation of the data. Building on the existing literature (e. g. Coles, 1989, Bohlin, 2005), I have endeavoured to open up a field of research that is relatively unexplored in contemporary discourse about children's reading. To do so, I have focused on making new and existing concepts accessible to readers including future researchers. I have also integrated new and existing concepts such as moral touchstones, alternative narratives, dramatisation and moral rehearsal in order to extend the dialogue about the place of the moral imagination in children's reading and literacy research.

Five key areas

Because of this, avenues for future research are particularly fertile and I shall outline what I would consider the most important and interesting lines for future inquiry.

Five areas single themselves out in relation to the data I collected.

1. *The influence of gender on the key conceptual categories of the research as well as on moral rehearsal as such.*

Clearly, the capacity of boys and girls to engage in moral rehearsal may vary, and the ways in which they do so certainly appears to be suggested by my analysis in chapter 11. Boys and girls both need opportunities to develop a discourse of value in the classroom and further interpretive research is needed about this process and the processes of moral rehearsal themselves such as dramatisation. What, for example, are the similarities and differences between the ways in which boys and girls engage in dramatisation and for what purposes? Are these, for example, related to the internalisation of moral value in consciousness or the reflexivity of personal subjectivity – that is, to the constitution of girl's and boy's subjectivity as persons? How important are mimetic and diegetic rehearsal to boys and girls and what is the relative preponderance of their use and why?

2. *The use of language in moral rehearsal.*

I did carry out some preliminary analysis of this interesting area whilst analysing the data but would suggest it would be a fruitful field of inquiry. Conditional structures, as I commented in chapter 9, are relatively common in the data set I collected, as are the use of the word “like” to introduce mimetic rehearsal. Language as the medium of discourse encodes the structure of children's moral thinking and therefore a more detailed study of this area may reveal other aspects of moral rehearsal itself.

3. *The emotional landscape of children's responses to literature needs much more serious reflection.*

As Afflerbach (2000: 174) suggests, this is an area itself that needs more research, a notable and somewhat baffling admission. In chapter 9 I documented the wide range of children's emotional responses to fiction in this study and their relation to a discourse of value. Their importance needs further investigation, partly because of their prominence in the data but also because the emotions have a profound influence on the ways in which we interpret and organise experience (Egan, 1992: 70). A part of the aesthetic dimension of response, children's emotional lives have an important connection with their moral lives and this needs further explication and inquiry to establish the more precise relationships between emotion, comprehension, memory and moral rehearsal.

4. *The link between moral rehearsal and comprehension itself also needs further inquiry.*

How far does moral rehearsal aid future reading and comprehension – as I suggested it may in chapter 10? How far might processes such as the creation of alternative narratives actually disrupt comprehension because of the possibility of confusion in the child's mind between the original narrative and their own, self-generated alternative narrative? The relationship between moral rehearsal and metacognition might therefore be usefully explored in future research.

5. *Longitudinal studies of the moral imagination are certainly needed – those that build on the concepts I have developed in this thesis.*

Comparison studies between children from different groups and of different ages – especially younger ages – are needed to examine the applicability of the concepts I have developed in this thesis. Far from simply “verifying” the “substantive theory” I have developed, further comparative analysis can only modify, extend or develop the

findings in accordance with good practice amongst qualitative researchers in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 256). Further comparison amongst other children in other contexts may reveal further sub-categories of my main concepts such as dramatisation, extending the subtlety and sensitivity of the theory itself.

#### Moral imagination and the family

Finally, the family is a rich area into which to take this work. Family literacy is a relatively new area for research which generally lags behind policy and practice (Purcell-Gates, 2000: 866) and relatively unexplored are, for example, the compatibility among the cultures of schools, homes and family literacy programmes. Children's response to the moral dimension of fiction needs exploring within a family context. Further case studies based on the careful documenting of children's interaction with texts, siblings, parents and everyday life are needed like those of Wolf and Heath (1992). Their account of two young children's (Lindsey and Ashley) reading, talk and spontaneous play shows how important literature became for them as a frame of reference from which to draw characters, objects, events and emotions to measure the world (*ibid.* 105). The mediating influence of families – of parents, siblings and shared reading and interaction around texts – on the moral imagination needs exploring in relation to fiction in the home. The place of the family as a bearer of culture itself – of moral and spiritual values might form the basis of such an inquiry.

## 11.9 Summary and conclusions

### Literacy and the person

If literacy - as I suggested at the opening of this chapter – is concerned with what it means to be human, then it should be clear that literacy continues to have a vital role

in the ‘design of social futures’ (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000a). This is largely because literacy and reading are an expression of the human person, of language and of reality. In order to emphasise the notion of literacy as concerned with the nature of the human person and with the search for “essential” moral and spiritual values, I put forward five propositions. These include the key ideas that:

- ❖ Literacy has a transcendent and cultural value in mediating the contact of “authoritative communities” such as schools and families with “essential” moral and spiritual values.
- ❖ Literacy has a role in strengthening the connection between imagination, conscience and culture.
- ❖ Moral and spiritual questions of existential significance to children and childhood should be included in literacy discourse, theory and research.

Moral rehearsal, the *logos* and language

To explore these further, I discussed the need for dialogue between broadly political-liberal and religious traditions in relation to the social sciences, the human person and literacy. Moral rehearsal I have suggested, as an aspect of literacy practice, allows children to reflect upon moral and spiritual values and participate in a form of reflexion that enlarges their sense of self and consciousness, shaping it according to a discourse of value. I discussed how some advocates of new literacy studies and critical literacy such as Barton (1994, 1998), Street (1984, 1995) and Gee (1996, 2000) invoke metaphors such as “ecology” and “emancipatory” to promote a literacy with its own accompanying norms. Envisioning a “new society”, I argue that such literacy advocates tend to see literacy as a vehicle for social and political change. I suggested that the normative presuppositions of their project may be in danger of leading to the diminution of the concept of an objective moral drama between good and evil; to this extent they may make it more difficult for literacy to be concerned with the nature of the human person as a moral being.

### The child as cipher

I examined this further with reference to some developments in contemporary children's literature criticism (e. g. Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994, Hunt, 1999) in which the deconstruction of childhood follows upon the loss of the notion of "objective value". I argue that such a "criticism of disenchantment", like that of some critical literacy theorists leads to the loss of the irreducible in man and therefore of man as a personal subject. The child, with no objective value, can easily become the cipher of society, culture or the individual critic. To emphasise this, I discussed the role of moral rehearsal, culture and imagination in providing children with the means towards the symbolic articulation of reality – including that which is of transcendent significance.

### Authoritative communities of moral rehearsal

In a discussion of the importance of "authoritative communities", I also suggested that different traditions – including those of political liberalism and Western realism - each have a contribution to make towards ensuring that literacy and reading remain a living force in children's lives. Each has a shared responsibility to mediate the ethical concerns of justice in a changing and developing world. In a note on teaching and learning I pointed out the special responsibility that parents and teachers, as representatives of "authoritative communities" have in the formation of conscience. I suggested some considerations that need to be made in the selection of fiction for the home and the classroom that are consistent with the moral imagination.

I also discussed some limitations of this thesis as a whole and made suggestions for future directions in research about fiction and the moral imagination and about moral rehearsal as a 'substantive theory' of children's reading response (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 33 - 35). These included a focus on gender, language, the role of emotion and

the connection between moral rehearsal and comprehension. I suggested that other fruitful directions for research might include the development of longitudinal studies with different groups and ages of children and a focus on the family as an aspect of moral rehearsal as a literacy practice.

## Chapter 12

### Conclusions

'We all live a great proportion of our lives in a surrender to stories about our lives, and about other possible lives; we live more or less *in* stories, depending on how strongly we resist surrendering to what is "only" imagined.'

Booth (1988: 14 - 15)

#### 12.1 The ethics of fiction

The pursuit of wisdom

The capacity of children to pursue wisdom, to hope for moral answers – 'a clue or two about how this life ought to be lived' (Coles, 1990: 146) – and to connect their lives to others is reflected in the analysis I have presented about children's responses to fiction. It should be clear from the many examples I have described that children respond variously and imaginatively to stories and in ways that are often unexpected. They go well beyond understanding the story itself when responding by searching and probing for ways in which to grasp the significance of what they have read – often in deeply personal terms. That this is an ethical, and at times spiritual process I have tried to demonstrate through the data; why ethical criticism as a whole may have fallen on "hard times" is suggested by Booth's (1988: 38ff) discussion of this issue which should be considered in the light of contemporary Western culture's rejection of universal, ethical norms for human behaviour (Veith, 1994, Guroian, 1998, 2002, Budziszewski, 1999).

Ultimate questions

First, ethical criticism applied to fiction is of more obviously universal concern than other types of criticism mainly because narrative itself is universal - as is the notion of morality though this is now fragmented and dis-unified in postmodern Western culture (Veith, 1994: 16ff). Secondly, the ethics of narrative is a peculiarly reflexive



study, potentially prone to the kind of subjectivism now demonstrated by some critics (e. g. Fish, 1995). Thirdly, the ethics of narrative is reciprocal in the sense that encounters between readers and texts are involved within certain contexts. The complexity of this encounter should be clear from the rich interplay of developing readers and texts I have described in chapter 6 – 9. Finally and perhaps most significantly, ethical debate about narrative soon leads to discussions about ultimate questions and the basis upon which readers come to understand reality.

#### Conscience and *what is*

That is, ethics also concerns *what is*; in contemporary culture however, objective norms for ethical reality are often consistently rejected in favour of personal preferences, opinions or group constructs (Veith, 1994: 47ff):

conscience appears as an expression of the absolute value of the subjective self, above and beyond which there can be no further judgement in the moral realm...as far as morality and religion is concerned, the self is the final arbiter...in the modern concept of the conscience, the conscience represents the canonizing of relativism, of the impossibility of establishing common moral and religious standards. (Ratzinger, 2004a: 207)

Because of the reciprocal, reflexive but universally complex nature of ethical criticism, and because of the continually contested nature of reality as a whole, the ethics of reading have proved divisive and controversial ever since Plato's statement in *The Republic* about which poets should be included for reading in the education of children (Lee, 1955: *Book 3*, 130ff).

#### Imaginative experience, consciousness and subjectivity

It should be remembered, however, that as far as children are concerned ethical and imaginative encounter with narrative has the capacity, as I have argued, to shape their view of reality:

The questions we ask about...stories... - Should I believe this narrator, and thus join him? Am I willing to be the kind of person that this story-teller is asking me to be? Will I accept this author among the small circle of my true friends? – these might well have been asked about any story from the beginning of time. And whether or not a given culture ever asked the questions openly, their implicit answers have determined to a great extent what that culture was to be. (Booth, 1988: 39)

The moral imagination, however, as a power of ethical perception, needs nurture and education (Kirk, 1996). Narratives, as I have suggested, provide one way in which such education can be met because imaginative experience imbues consciousness with its own shape and penetrates, through the reflexivity of consciousness, to the subjectivity of the child as person. In a very real sense then, reading and responding to the moral dimension of fiction can contribute to the formation of children's personhood and to their personal 'mythos' – that stock of imaginative portrayals of reality by which they come to measure the world.

#### Listening to children

In making a "modest proposal" concerning the nature and purpose of literacy, I have emphasised the importance the moral and spiritual dimension of children's lives and their relationship to reading as a subject of scholarly enquiry. The origin of this proposal comes partly from my own involvement with children as a father of six, but also from long years in the classroom listening to children talk about their texts. If children's moral and emotional lives are to be taken seriously, greater attention needs to be paid by teachers, researchers and parents to what children say themselves. By including children's voices so prominently in this thesis I have hoped to correct an imbalance in the literature on children's reading and the moral imagination.

## 12.2 Contribution to knowledge

### Grounded concepts

Naturally my own background in developmental psychology, literature and Catholic life has influenced the way in which I introduce ethical categories of analysis into the debate; I consider this part of the originality of the thesis. I also consider the way in which I have organised the empirical, grounded concepts about children's strategies part of the original contribution to knowledge of the work. I have opened the notion of discourse of value as an area for empirical observation, inquiry and debate about children's responses to reading, partly by providing new conceptual terms for analysis such as mimetic and diegetic rehearsal. These await further development and application to new participant groups of children. I have taken pains to emphasise the importance of emotion in this process, another original contribution to existing knowledge about children's literary experience.

### An original application

Perhaps most significantly however, the originality of this thesis lies in the interpretive application of Wojtyla's (1979) phenomenology of the person to reveal the way in which by responding to fiction, the child's consciousness and personal subjectivity is shaped through the mediation of text and classroom talk. This is an original application of Wojtyla's work and provides empirical as opposed to anecdotal support for the proposition that reading fiction shapes children's moral and spiritual views of the world. I have also tried to place different philosophical approaches into a dialogue within the structure of this interpretation and within the final analysis of literacy developments in chapter 11. In this sense, I have sought common ground between realist and non-realist philosophers in relation to children's reading. Of necessity,

however, I have moved beyond this in my discussion of different views of language and the person within current literacy developments in the same chapter.

### **12.3 Epilogue**

The adventure of the permanent things

As a rehearsal for the possibilities of living in the world, reading fiction invites the kind of participation from children that is more than just ‘spectatorship’ (Harding, 1977: 59 - 61). Literature I have argued, can give children ‘icons’ of imagination, admitting them to experiences not their own (Lewis, 1961: 130ff). This enlargement – the kind engaged in by all the children in this study – can provide “windows” to other worlds and to the world of others. By imitating and recounting the lives of others in responding to story, children’s imaginations find wings. To transcend oneself in this way is to move beyond the confines of what is impermanent, changing and fragmentary; it is to begin the adventure of the permanent things.

Reading and love

Surprisingly, I would like finally to suggest that this kind of reading and responding has something in common with the experience of love (Martin, 2000: 385, Milne, 2005: 105). In developing a moral imagination children begin to see the world as others see it, extending their empathy for others’ lives and developing greater familiarity with the ways in which virtue is lived or neglected in the choices of the acting person. In transcending the particularities of their own lives by reading fiction children find meaning in a world that can often seem cruel and chaotic. Stories are a reassurance that our struggles and sufferings have meaning (Kilpatrick, 1994: 47). They are a reminder that ‘if the world is meaningless, then so are we; if we mean something, we do not mean alone’ (Lewis, 1965: 30).

## Re-enchantment

Cast out on a sea of meaning, children soon learn to find their way. Fiction, if it is wisely used, can provide a compass for some children to chart and prepare themselves for life. It is not a replacement for ethics or religious faith, but a prologue to a greater mystery; a 'suburb of Jerusalem' that for some, offers a road in to the restoration of our common moral sense by which 'imitation may pass into initiation' (Lewis, 1940a: 81 - 82). If the world is to be re-enchanted in our time, story and the imagination have an important part to play in initiating children into authentic moral and spiritual values for,

the best stories become messengers in their own right, in which something of heaven gleams through. We all need such messengers, from time to time. Certainly children's hearts, which are so ready to awaken, will respond to the call of the messenger when it sounds. (Caldecott, 2005: 3)

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Data collection chart

Data type	Interview	Verbal report	Pair work	Group work	Reading journal	Class written work	Concept map	Documents	Other
Case									
Gareth	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	School File	✓
Holly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	School File	✓
Rachel	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		School File	
Darren	✓		✓					School File	
James	✓	✓	✓			✓		School File	
Anna	✓	✓	✓			✓		School File	
Natalie			✓					School File	
Kaleem	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	School File	
Ryan	✓		✓					School File	
Amy			✓		✓	✓	✓	School File	
Stephen			✓		✓			School File	
Ben			✓					School File	
Jasmin				✓				School File	
Chris			✓					School File	
Sarah			✓					School File	

Adapted from Hopkins (2002: 139).

The shaded area refers to the children who were the main cases in the study (See Chapter 5).

## Appendix 2: Parental consent letter for interviews

*Date as prepared please*

*Dear*

### ***Reading Research Project***

I am pleased to inform you that **your son/daughter** has volunteered to take part in a reading research project at \*\*\*\*\* School. I am conducting this as part of a PhD project about children's reading of fiction. As you are aware, good reading skills are essential to the success of pupils at school and the reading of fiction has an essential part in the English curriculum.

Their participation is an important part of this project and will mainly involve them, at present in taking part in two half-hour individual interviews and one pair or group activity with other volunteers. These will be about their reading. The pair and group activities will take place at lunchtime in my room. The individual interviews, however, will take place after school in the St Mary's Centre from 3.30 to approximately 4.00pm.

In order to carry out the interviews, I need your permission for **your son/daughter** to stay at school for their interviews. If you are willing to give them permission, please sign and return the attached slip with **your son/daughter** to me as soon as possible, or before their interviews.

A timetable of interview and activity dates is enclosed for your information. I think **your son/daughter** will enjoy the experience and they will receive a research project certificate for taking part over the coming weeks. I look forward to working with them.

If you wish to discuss any aspects of the project with me at more length, please contact the school for an appointment and I would be glad to do so.

Yours sincerely

Simon Milne  
Head of English

Pupils Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Form: \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for my son/daughter to attend two half-hour reading research interviews after school at \*\*\*\*\* school from 3.30 – approximately 4.00pm. I understand the interviews will be carried out in the St Mary's Centre.

Signature (Parent/Guardian): \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3: Timetable example for data collection

<b>Reading Research Group</b> Meetings will take place with Mr Milne after school in the <b>St Mary's Centre</b> (individual meetings) or at lunchtimes in <b>E1</b> (pair and group meetings).			
<i>Reading Research Group</i>	Name	Form	Place
Monday 10 <sup>th</sup> November 2003	Gareth		St Mary's Centre
Wednesday 12 <sup>th</sup> November 2003	Jasmin Gareth Kaleem		E1
Monday 17 <sup>th</sup> November 2003	Kaleem		St Mary's Centre
Monday 24 <sup>th</sup> November 2003	Jasmin		St Mary's Centre
Monday 1 <sup>st</sup> December 2003	Holly		St Mary's Centre
Wednesday 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2003	Holly Jasmin Kaleem		E1
<p><b>Meetings will last up to a half hour each from 1.00pm until 1.30pm at lunchtime or from 3.30-4.00pm after school.</b></p> <p><b><i>Early lunch will be available for all pupils concerned</i></b></p> <p>Each meeting will consist of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews and discussion about pupils' reading of fiction.</li> <li>• Sessions will be tape recorded or video-recorded with pupils' permission.</li> <li>• Pupils will be asked to complete some written work in the form of a short reading journal based on their reading and/or some brainstorming of ideas as concept maps.</li> <li>• Pupils will be asked to discuss a story they have recently read in English or a short story given to them to read for the project.</li> <li>• This work can form part of their English course and they may be given credit for it in the usual ways. They will receive a taking-part certificate at the end of the project.</li> </ul> <p>At present the group are focusing on <i>The Pearl</i> by John Steinbeck.</p> <p><b>Please Note.</b> Permission from parents will be sought by letter for the after school sessions. If the information obtained is to be used other than for development purposes (e.g. for publication or inclusion in the thesis) parents' permission will be sought.</p> <p>Discussion with pupils cannot be treated strictly in confidence because of the possibility of disclosure. Pupils are only told about the reading focus of the project.</p> <p>Material will only be published or used with pupils' and parents' permission.</p>			

#### Appendix 4: Example questions from interview guides

##### **Characters: Words, Beliefs and Choices**

1. Tell me about the characters in the story.
2. What do you find especially interesting about them/him/her?
3. Tell me about the kinds of things they've said or talked about in the story so far? Give some examples.
4. Why did they say these things do you think?
5. What kinds of choices do you notice the character making? Give some examples.
6. Why do you think they/he/she made them?
7. What do you think about these/these choice(s)? Why?
8. Do you think any of the characters have especially strong beliefs about themselves, others or the world around them? Give some examples.
9. How do their beliefs help or not help them in the story?
10. Do you agree with the choices the character(s) have made? If so why? If not why not?
11. Do they experience any difficulties in the story? Why? Give examples.

##### **Justice**

1. Do characters act fairly or unfairly in the story? If so, give examples and say why you think this.
2. What are your views or thoughts about this? Why?
3. Is this important in the story? Why?
4. Are characters honest or dishonest in the story? If so, give examples and say why you think this.
5. What are your views or thoughts about this? Why?
6. Is this important in the story? Why?
7. Are characters truthful or untruthful in the story? If so, give examples and say why you think this.
8. What are your views or thoughts about this? Why?
9. Is this important in the story? Why?
10. Do characters keep or break their promises in the story? If so, give examples and say why?
11. What are your views or thoughts about this? Why?
12. Is this important in the story? Why?

## Appendix 5: Talk task example

List some things that happen or were done or said by characters that you thought were fair or unfair in the story.

Tell each other and talk together about what happened and why you think they are fair or unfair.

Make a few notes as a spider diagram below. Draw a picture about one thing that happened that you thought was fair or unfair.

## Appendix 6: Reading journal instructions

Welcome to your reading journal! This is your journal so you can write whatever is personal to you about your reading in it. **Remember to put the title and author of the story you are reading each day and to date each journal entry.** Here are some things I'd like you to think carefully about when and after you read stories that I'd like you to write about:

- What you were thinking and feeling as you were reading the story;
- What you think and feel about the story after you've been reading;
- What you think and feel about how the characters behaved;
- Whether you have any thoughts or feelings about whether the characters behaved well or badly and why;
- What you think or feel you have learned or understood about good or evil from the story.

You could also draw pictures if you want to in response to the story.

And finally, anything else you especially want to say and note down. This could include:

Questions (for the author or for the story), things you are not clear about, things that you would like to have seen happen differently, things that you thought were particularly enjoyable or interesting about the story.

## Appendix 7: Instructions to transcribers

### *Transcribing Tapes*

The interviews are conversations and need transcribing with this in mind and with the intention of rendering clearly, as far as possible what each participant says.

Please remember that the interviews/recordings of individual interviews are, in a limited sense, confidential although no guarantees have been given to pupils nor parents that confidentiality would be kept. The reason for this is the possibility of disclosure. Please treat them, for transcription purposes as confidential though they remain open to non-confidential uses with pupils' permission.

A few points:

1. Use SM and pupil name for names
2. Indent actual speech to line up with names
3. Minimise punctuation other than starts of speakers and proper nouns, if obvious
4. Indicate pauses by an ellipsis (...)
5. If the pause is longer than 3 seconds use a double ellipsis
6. Do not guess what speakers say – indicate you cannot hear it using [unclear]
7. Show obvious emphases or stresses on words using italics
8. Show obvious non-verbal responses like laughter in brackets e.g. [laughter]; if interjected use (laughter)
9. Render words as near to their standard usage as possible, except where speakers shorten words etc e.g. 'cause, gonna. If unsure transcribe it how it sounds
10. Aim for meaning to be clear
11. Where speakers overlap at starts/ends of sentences/speech use underlining to show spoken together
12. Where one speaker interjects while another is still speaking, include this in brackets e.g. (yes)
13. If in doubt about how to do something, indicate this using [?]

Good luck and thanks.

Stephen Milne



## Appendix 8: Letter to parents requesting release of data collected

School letterhead

Date as typed

Dear

*Reading Research Project*

Since **-name-** successfully took part in the Reading Research Project I have been conducting at the school I have begun to review and write about some of the work that **-name-** and the other pupils did in the project about stories we studied. Most of the work, as you know, has been based on responses to stories in conversations with me and with other pupils. I have also kept some of their written work.

I would like to be able to publish extracts of **-name's-** work on the project in my PhD thesis as well as in a variety of educational journals. I would also like to be able to discuss their work on the project with colleagues. In order for me to do this, I would be grateful if you would sign the agreement slip at the bottom of this letter, releasing your child's work from the research project to me for these purposes. I will, of course, keep the identity of all the pupils who took part, including that of **-name-** anonymous as far as is possible in any written publications.

If you would like to discuss this with me further, please telephone the school to make an appointment with me to do so. I would like to thank both you and **-name-** for their co-operation and participation. The project has been an invaluable experience and without **-name's-** participation would not have been possible.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Milne  
Teacher of English

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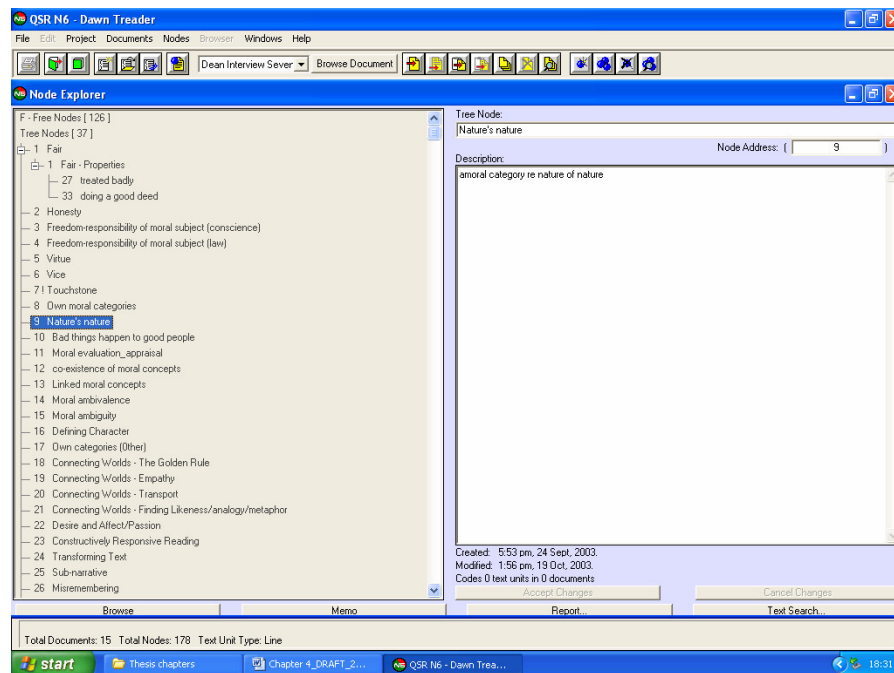
Pupil Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Form: \_\_\_\_\_

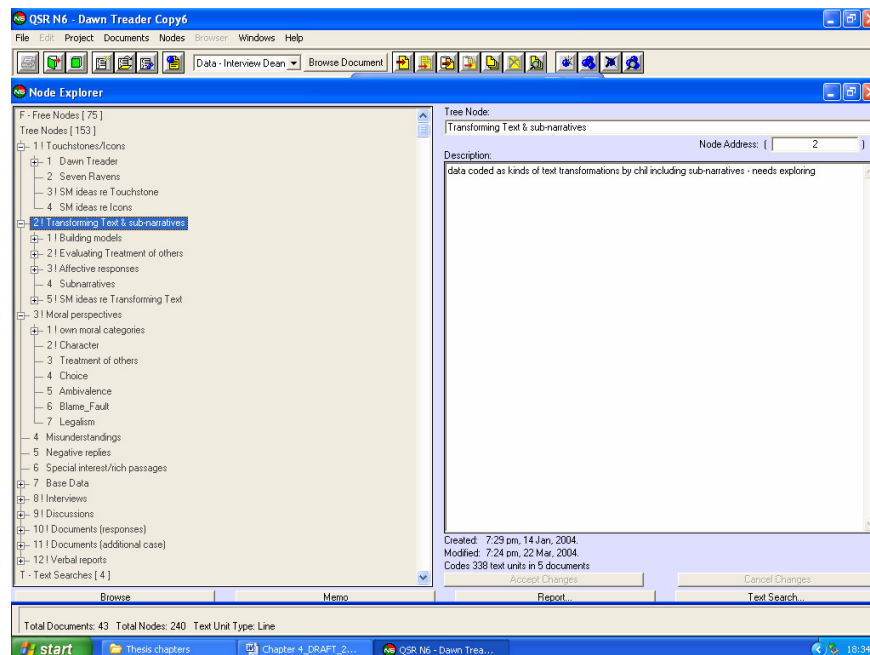
I agree to my son/daughter's work from the Reading Research Project being used in publications arising from the project.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent/Guardian)

## Appendix 9: Developing conceptual (tree) structure in N6



Initial tree structure in N6 showing a large range of conceptual categories



A more developed tree structure showing organization of emerging concepts