Far away and close to home: Children's toponyms and imagined geographies, c. 1870 – c. 1950

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Abstract

This article draws attention to a neglected topic in historical geography: the names children give to places that matter to them. In doing so, it seeks to make a contribution to the rapidly developing field of children's geography and to bring together two rarely-connected research areas: geographical and psychological research into children's play and literary research on cartography in children's fiction. Although early studies of the spatiality of children's play emphasized the need for research into children's toponymy, there has as yet been little scholarly response. The present study focuses on a specific form of children's toponymy current in early and mid-twentieth-century England: transfigurative naming. This is where familiar places in the child's home neighbourhood are given exotic names, sometimes in an ongoing, processual dialogue with fictional cartography (as in Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series). Investigation of four life-writing case studies suggests that transfigurative naming drew on discursive sources that were contingent on time, space and class, but that there were nevertheless important commonalities in the circumstances in which it arose and the purposes it served. The most striking of these was that transfigurative naming was deployed by children and youths in stable affective and residential contexts seeking to explore and extend their 'home range'. It is argued that this may reflect a developmental dialectic between security and growth. The article concludes by considering some of the methodological and conceptual challenges scholars will need to address to achieve a more comprehensive knowledge and understanding of children's toponymns.

Keywords
Children's geographies; literary cartography; landscapes of play; transfigurative naming

Far away and close to home: children's toponyms and imagined geographies, c.1870-c.1950

This article draws attention to a rich but neglected research area: the invention and use by children of place names (toponyms).[1] Both Roger Hart's *Children's Experience of Place* (1979) and Robin Moore's *Childhood's Domain* (1986), two of the most influential studies of children's outdoor play, highlighted the crucial significance of children's toponyms but neither devoted more than a few paragraphs to the subject and there has been little response to Hart's call for further research.[2] Children's toponyms are interesting because they reveal much about how children relate to the landscapes of their 'home range', about the reciprocities, tensions and divergences between adults' and children's local topographies and about the wider significance of landscape in children's lives.[3]

In attending to children's toponyms, I hope to make a contribution to the rapidly developing literature on children's geographies. The children's geographies research agenda is motivated by a recognition that children constitute about a quarter of the world's population yet are disempowered and marginalized, socially, politically and in academic research.[4] This is especially true with respect to the radical otherness of children's perceptions, perspectives and experiences, which tends to receive

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[1] The long, distinguished tradition of place name research in historical geography, exemplified by works like M. Gelling, *Place-names in the Landscape: The Geographical Roots of Britain's Place-names*, Phoenix, 2000; H. Thorpe, The green villages of County Durham, *Transactions and Papers (Institute of British Geographers)* 15 (1949) 155-180; B.K. Roberts*, The Making of the English Village: A Study in Historical Geography*, Boston, 1987; and the publications of the English Place Name Society, has been remarkably oblivious to children's toponyms.

[2] R. Hart, *Children's Experience of Place*, Irvington, 1979, 342, 48; R. Moore, *Childhood's Domain: Play and Place in Child Development*, London, 1986, 225.

[3] On the concept of 'home range', see H.E. Woolley, Decreasing experiences of home range, outdoor spaces, activities and companions: changes across three generations in Sheffield in north England, *Children's Geographies* 13 (2015) 677-691.

[4] 'Population ages 0-14 (% of total population)', https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sp.pop.0014.to.zs?end=2018&start=1960&view=chart, last accessed 10 November 2019.

scant attention from traditional 'geography of children' approaches that privilege the effects of external structures and adult constructions on children's lives. Critical geographers such as Chris Philo began to draw attention to the need for a more child-centred approach in the 1990s, leading to the founding of the journal *Children's Geographies* in 2003 and the publication of Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine's edited collection of the same title the following year.[5] But the new paradigm is still emerging in certain respects, notably in relation to historical children's geographies, as is evident in the paucity of historical research published in *Children's Geographies*, and, conversely, of papers informed by child-centred perspectives in the *Journal of Historical Geography.* One of the aims of the present article is to encourage greater convergence between these fields.

More specifically, I want to bring together two areas of scholarship which are usually considered in isolation but address similar issues from different perspectives: geographical and psychological research into children's experience of place, and literary historical research into the representation of space in children's fiction. As a historian, I am particularly interested in the ways in which children's place naming is inflected historically (for example by religious, literary, colonial and touristic discourses). With this in mind, I will focus primarily on a particular form of children's toponymic practice that crosses and re-crosses the divide between literary representation and childhood play: transfigurative naming. This is where familiar, seemingly quotidian landscape elements are given an exotic toponym. What constitutes 'exotic' depends on the spatial and temporal context.[6] Examples mentioned to me by members of the Andover (UK) History and Archaeology Society (AHAS) after I gave a paper on this subject included: 'the Khyber Pass', 'Lake Titicaca', 'Popocatepetl', 'Bodmin Moor'

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[5] C. Philo, Neglected rural geographies: a review, *Journal of Rural Studies* 8 (1992) 193-207 and S.L. Holloway and G. Valentine (Eds), *Children's Geographies: Playing, Living, Learning*, Abingdon, 2004.

[6] Compare John Kirkland Wright's emphasis on '*terrae incognitae*', populated with imaginary concepts, in the development of geographical awareness, I.M. Keighren, Geosophy, imagination, and terrae incognitae: exploring the intellectual history of John Kirtland Wright, *Journal of Historical Geography* 31 (2005) 546-550.

and 'the Tarzan Tree'.[7] These were all apparently names used in childhood for local landscape features and inscribe varying geographical and cultural contexts reflecting, in part, the age range of my informants. In my own childhood (in late 1970s/early 1980s central England) my friends and I referred to an undistinguished cattle shelter far out on the common at the end of our road as 'the South Pole'. Such transfigurative names are closely related to the 'hybrid geographical imagination full of real places… supplemented by numerous more-or-less made-up places' that Philo suggests are characteristic of childhood. Indeed, this paper is written in the conviction that, as Philo argues, careful reading of 'memories, imaginations and reveries of childhood' that 'happily fuse the real and imagined' can bring us closer to central but neglected and difficult-to-access aspects of children's lives.[8] However, although the focus of this paper will be on transfigurative naming, my wider purpose is to draw attention to the ample scope for further research into children's toponymic practices in a more general sense, as well as some of the methodological and conceptual difficulties in undertaking it.

While there is no substantial literature on children's toponyms, important geographical, sociological and psychological work has been conducted on children's experience of place, particularly in relation to play. Hart's pioneering study of 'Inavale', 'a fairly typical New England town', sought to identify children's preferred play spaces through direct questioning, map-drawing, accompanied visits and observation. Most children, he found, preferred outdoor places such as the 'ball park', rivers, lakes, woods and self-constructed forts and play houses. Children's favourite places were, however, almost always very close to home. Drawing on the nineteenth-century educational theorist Friedrich Froebel,

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[7] The paper – 'Children and the Making of Rural Spaces in 20th century England' - was the AHAS's annual Dacre Lecture, given 27 April 2018. My thanks to the AHAS for this invitation and the information proferred.

[8] C. Philo, 'To go back up the side hill': memories, imaginations and reveries of childhood, *Children's Geographies* 1 (2003) 18-19.

Hart attributed these findings to an innate 'desire [in children] to comprehend the extent and diversity of the world in order to better understand their own place within it'.[9]

Although Hart's discussion of toponyms was brief, he made some important claims. Firstly, he believed that a child's landscape 'is commonly personal, that is with very few place names shared with other children or adults'.[10] Secondly, these personal place names were typically functional, such as 'the house with the dog that barks', or 'the sliding hill', and were directly tied to the child's own uses of the landscape. Thirdly, however:

> children in their play often teach each other these personal place names, and parts of these landscapes become shared in meaning. A child's degree of differentiation is remarkable: simple backgardens described by their adult owners as 'lawn', 'vegetable plot', 'apple tree' and 'ditch' will commonly have dozens of highly minute niches for different activities. These places are a part of child-culture which is not shared with adults unless the adults make a special effort.[11]

Finally, Hart argued that children's place names reveal that 'child-culture generates some of its own categories of meaning': the names children give to places influence how they, and perhaps other children, subsequently use those places, since 'place names become normative prescriptions for use'.[12]

Moore's study of outdoor play in West London, Stevenage and Stoke-on-Trent (UK) broadly endorsed Hart's conclusions. Like Hart, Moore emphasized the value of informal natural or semi-natural areas

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[9] Hart, *Children's Experience of Place*, 261, 307, 336.

[10] If so, children's toponyms may contrast with their invented names for body parts, which Hardman suggests are readily shared with adults, see C. Hardman, Can there be an anthropology of children?, *Childhood* 8 (2001) 508-509.

[11] Hart, *Children's Experience of Place*, 342.

[12] Hart, *Children's Experience of Place*, 348.

including vacant lots and waste ground that allowed children scope to find and modify their own play objects, as opposed to play facilities purpose-built by adults such as playgrounds or indoor commercial venues.[13] Despite the preference for outdoor play, however, the drawings of favourite places the children Moore studied made for him 'indicated home to be the centre of family life and a child's ultimate haven of security and comfort'.[14] There are a number of examples of children's toponyms scattered through Moore's study. Perhaps the most interesting are those reported by Chris (aged ten) from Mill Hill, Stoke-on-Trent. He was fascinated by newts and had named eight local ponds according to the number of newts they held. Six were named numerically (the 'number-one newting pool' etc) but two had special names: 'Queenie' (the best) and 'Ex-Queenie' (next best). Moore observes that this is 'a perfect example of true territorial possession' and echoes Hart's claim that distinctive childhood toponymies of this kind testify to the existence of a semi-autonomous child culture:

> When children invent their own toponyms (place names), it indicates a degree of proprietorship that can only happen when adult culture does not dominate the scene too heavily. Children need landscapes that are open to creative verbal interpretation, not ones limited by simplistic environmental change that overlooks the history, language and culture embodied in our physical surroundings.[15]

In subsequent work, Harry Heft applied James and Eleanor Gibson's theory of affordances to the empirical evidence assembled by Hart and Moore. Affordance theory argues that the perception of the environment is inherently relational. Rather than perceiving forms, we perceive how a particular feature of the environment might be useful to us. Caught in a rainstorm without a coat, for example,

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[13] Moore, *Childhood's Domain*, 2, 76, 148, 225; Hart, *Children's Experience of Place*, 349-350.

[14] Moore, *Childhood's Domain*, 82.

[15] Moore, *Childhood's Domain*, 225. M.H. Matthews' study of Coventry mentions another wildlife-related children's toponym: the 'moth-hawk tree'. See M.H. Matthews, Environmental cognition of young children: images of journey to school and home area, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 9 (1984) 95. See also M.H. Matthews, *Making Sense of Place: Children's Understanding of Large-Scale Environments*, Hemel Hempstead, 1992, 199.

our initial apprehension of a roofed bus stop might be as a 'shelter-under-able place' rather than as a bus stop. Since children's interests, concerns and capacities differ greatly from those of adults, Heft argues that a form-based approach is too blunt an instrument to understand children's spatial preferences and needs. A form-based category like 'tree', for example, may mask distinctions crucial to children that an affordances perspective could reveal, distinguishing between 'climb-on-able', 'swing-on-able', 'hide-behind-able', 'apple-eat-from-able' trees and so forth. Heft adduced Hart and Moore's findings that children often named places according to their functional significance as evidence for an affordance view of children's environments: the 'snow slide to the school bus'; 'the place where the fair is'; 'the roller-coaster hill'. He also identified a particular type of outdoor space, which he denominated the 'micro-habitat', as offering an especially valuable combination of affordances for children: 'certain places... are valued as play areas because they simultaneously afford a shelter from wind, traffic, and at the same time afford a measure of privacy - a special "children only" place'.[16]

Special, private places of this kind were investigated more fully in David Sobel's *Children's Special Places: Exploring the Role of Forts, Dens and Bush Houses in Middle Childhood* (1993).[17] Sobel researched the outdoor play of children aged between five and eleven in two contrasting primary schools: Denbury in Devon (UK) and Harvey Vale, Carriacou (Grenada). Den and play house building were prominent in both settings – sixty percent of the Devon children referred to them in interviews or on the maps they were asked to draw, and seventy-eight percent of the Carriacou children.[18] Sobel inferred that den building might be driven by developmental rather than cultural imperatives. Drawing

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[16] H. Heft, Affordances of children's environments: a functional approach to environmental description, *Children's Environments Quarterly* 5 (1988) 29-37. On children's desire for private places free from adult intrusion, see also M. Francis, Childhood's garden: memory and meaning of gardens, *Children's Environments* 12 (1995) 183-191. See also C. Ward, *The Child in the City*, London, 1977, 76-85.

[17] Dens are also discussed in Colin Ward's classic study *The Child in the Country*, London, 1990, 88-96.

[18] D. Sobel, *Children's Special Places: Exploring the Role of Forts, Dens, and Bush Houses in Middle Childhood*, Detroit, 2002, 20, 33.

on Chilton Pearce and Carl Jung, he argued that middle childhood was a crucial period for the formation of the self:

> I suspect that it is the sense of self, the ego about to be born, that is sheltered in these private places. The onset of puberty in adolescence initiates an often painful focus on 'Who am I?'. The construction of private places is one of the ways that children physically and symbolically prepare themselves, in middle childhood, for this significant transition.[19]

Sobel suggests that forts, dens and houses are a 'concrete manifestation of the abstract sense of self that is born in adolescence. The person makes a literal place in the world in childhood preparatory to making a figurative place in the world in adolescence and adulthood.'[20]

Nicola Ross, in two studies of, respectively, eighty-four and two hundred primary school children from Fife, Scotland, endorsed many of Hart and Moore's findings (neither Heft nor Sobel is referenced). Ross underlines the 'importance of areas that children can adapt to their own needs and shape to become their own places'. She also further elucidates children's responsiveness to small-scale landscape features, such as a gap in a hedge through which horses could be seen, flowers, kerbs, railings and different kinds of tree, arguing that 'the sum of all these small parts plays a powerful role… in the forging of children's identities and… in shaping children's sense of belonging and attachment to

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[19] Sobel, *Children's Special Places*, 48. See also p. 70: 'During this period of middle childhood, the self is fragile and under construction and needs to be protected from view of the outside world. The secretive nature of the hiding places is significant. The self, like the metamorphosing larva of the butterfly, needs to be wrapped in a cocoon before it emerges into the light. Thus, the places that children seek out are places where they cannot be seen, places to begin the unfolding of the self'.

[20] Sobel, *Children's Special Places*, 109. Similarly, the French philosopher and literary theorist Gaston Bachelard draws attention to a passage from Richard Hughes's *A High Wind in Jamaica* (1929), in which the protagonist, Emily (aged ten), has been 'playing houses in a nook'. As she walks away, 'it suddenly flashed into her mind that she was *she*…'. G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Boston, 1969, 138-139.

their local area'.[21] In a subsequent study of children's journeys to school, Ross argues that being allowed to navigate outdoor environments unsupervised can set children's imaginations free, giving them time to 'just dawdle along' and become lost in their own thoughts.[22]

In observing that children's toponyms have 'barely been studied', Hart pointed out that despite this 'certain adult writers such as A.A. Milne have tapped them as excellent sources for children's literature'.[23] This is a pertinent comment since fictional children's toponyms are much more accessible, and better known, than their non-fictional counterparts. Much of the most interesting research has been in the context of maps in children's fiction, which almost invariably feature toponyms. For example, Hazel Sheeky Bird argues that maps and toponyms in early twentieth-century British children's fiction bear the imprint of two distinct modes of apprehending space, which she refers to as the regional and the imperial geographic imaginations. The former, she argues, was rooted in the early twentieth-century regional survey movement and was concerned with the development of geographic citizenship through fostering knowledge of the local area. The latter, by contrast, was concerned with conquest and possession. It derived, Bird suggests, from the long tradition of 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' narratives, of which one of the first, and certainly the most influential, was *Robinson Crusoe*.[24]

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[21] N.J. Ross, Children's space, *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education* 14 (2005), 339-340. Compare Hart, *Children's Experience of Place*, 342 on the 'dozens of minute niches' of children's local topographies.

[22] N.J. Ross, 'My journey to school …': foregrounding the meaning of school journeys and children's engagements and interactions in their everyday localities, *Children's Geographies* 5 (2007) 382-383. See also C. Philo, 'To go back up the side hill'.

[23] Hart, *Children's Experience of Place*, 342.

[24] H.S. Bird, *Class, Leisure and National Identity in British Children's Literature, 1918-1950*, New York, 2014, 87-88. She is drawing here on an extensive body of critical geographical research in which naming and mapping have been understood as assertions of power. See, for example, D.E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, London, 1984; M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London, 1992; J.B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, Baltimore and London, 2001.

Whereas Bird's interest is mainly in modes of apprehending landscape in children's fiction, Susan Honeyman is more concerned with the landscapes themselves, arguing that the spaces of children's fiction are typically small, confined and mappable, yet purportedly wild. Characteristic examples include secret gardens and desert islands. She suggests that these qualities reflect the nostalgic yearning of adult authors for what they recall as the 'totalized' (undivided) world of their childhood.[25] To fulfil this function, these imagined spaces must be securely separate from the taint of the adult world, yet somehow also accessible. Hence '[t]o maintain the separateness of such spaces without negating the escapes they enable requires careful attention to entrances and exits'.[26] Research by other scholars endorses Honeyman's emphasis on the significance of entrances and exits in children's literature: indeed the influential British science fiction and fantasy scholar Farah Mendlesohn identifies so-called 'portal quest fantasies' as a major subgenre of children's literature.[27] In this view, the romantic toponymy, intimacy and secrecy of childhood spaces as presented in children's literature serve the needs of adult authors rather than reflecting the experience of non-fictional children.

Honeyman's insistence that space in children's fiction is produced by predominantly romantic adult authorial constructions of childhood is, on the face of it, uncontroversial. However, Victor Watson opened up a new perspective by asking what happens when children themselves are the authors. He suggested that novels by children were not simply derivative, typically showing, for example, more concern with pleasure and achievement, and less with characterisation and maturation. However, he also argued that the publishing successes of child authors in England between 1930 and 1960 arose

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[25] Susan E. Honeyman, Childhood bound: In gardens, maps, and pictures, *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 34 (2001) 117-132. Compare Susan Stewart's discussion of the functions of miniaturization (as in models and dollhouses, for example) in Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham, NC, 1992, 37-69.

[26] Honeyman, Childhood bound, 343.

[27] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Middletown, CT, 2008, 1-58.

from a shared culture of outdoor leisure that provided a common frame of reference for middle-class adults and children.[28]

Picking up on Watson's suggestion that maps in children's literature are 'a special kind of reading game', and his questioning of simplistic notions of a one-way imposition of adult constructions of childhood on young readers, Anthony Pavlik argued, against Honeyman, for a more positive, open-ended understanding of literary maps and toponymy. Invoking De Certeau's distinction between maps and tours, Pavlik argued that:

> Whether of a fantasy place, or of a map of a real place, … each map reading has the potential to become a walk across the stage; each reading creates that map anew with different associations; each reading is a unique narrative that changes with each imagined 'tour'. At the same time, the freedom that these maps offer to readers in terms of the infinite possibilities to make spatial connections signifies the inability to regulate the behaviour of the readers who use them, and who can performatively explore them as enabling acts of the imagination in an endless map-reading game.[29]

David Cooper and Gary Priestnall advocate a similar, 'processual' understanding of literary cartography, suggesting in a discussion based partly on the well-known endpaper map in Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* (1930) that 'the individual map-user is free to make his or her own personal associations with other landscapes (both real and imagined) and other cartographies'.[30]

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[28] V. Watson, By children, about children, for children, in: E. Bearne and V. Watson (Eds), *Where Texts and Children Meet*, Abingdon, 2002, 58, 64-66. For the definitive account of this 'camping and tramping' literature, see Bird, *Class, Leisure and National Identity in British Children's Literature*, 16-35.

[29] A. Pavlik, 'A special kind of reading game': maps in children's literature, *International Research in Childrens Literature* 3 (2010) 40.

[30] D. Cooper and G. Priestnall, The processual intertextuality of literary cartographies: critical and digital practices, *Cartographic Journal* 48 (2011) 252. Compare Kiera Vaclavik, whose research on the nexus between children's literature and dressing up emphasizes 'inventiveness and creativity on the

This interest in child readers and authors as agents rather than passive subjects of adult constructions parallels the emergence of the children's geographies paradigm.[31] A chapter by Owain Jones in Holloway and Valentine's *Children's Geographies* is particularly pertinent here, because it offers a way out of the apparent impasse between a recognition of the culturally variable construction of childhood and children as active agents in their own right. Jones's study of 'Allswell', a Devon village dominated demographically by mainly middle-class incomers, suggests that the romantic construction of rural space as 'pure' and therefore safe for children can ironically open up space within which children can 'build their own geographies':

> Although romantic notions of childhood are yet another adult projection onto the otherness of children, which is driven by adult agendas, they have the effect of creating space for the otherness of children because they involve granting children some form of 'freedom' and, importantly, may loosen regimes of surveillance and curfews in particular circumstances. Children do not readily adopt the generic identity thrust upon them, but they can operate under the cover it may provide.[32]

In relation to children's transfigurative naming, I want to develop this perspective further by exploring the ongoing processual reciprocities and resistances between adult literary constructions of childhood space (what Honeyman calls the adult 'reterritorialization' of childhood) and the 'child-cultures', with their emphasis on privacy and the exclusion of adults, identified by Hart, Moore, Heft, Sobel and Ross. I will first consider transfigurative naming in children's literature, arguing that there was a reciprocal

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part of children; their active involvement in the reading process rather than passive reception of the author's labour', see K. Vaclavik, The dress of the book: children's literature, fashion and fancy dress, in: B. Carrington and J. Harding (Eds), *Beyond the Book: Transforming Children's Literature*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2014, 70. See also M. Guyatt, The non-European world in the lives of British children, 1870–1930, unpublished PhD thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2015.

[31] C. Philo, 'The corner-stones of my world' - Editorial introduction to special issue on spaces of childhood, *Childhood: A Global Journal of Child Research* 7 (2000) 243-256.

[32] O. Jones, Melting geography: purity, disorder, childhood and space, in: Holloway and Valentine (Eds), *Children's Geographies*, 29-47.

relationship between adult authors and children as play-agents, readers and as authors themselves. Children contributed actively at many levels to transfigurative naming as a literary practice, as well as shaping its reception. Secondly, the article uses life writing evidence to demonstrate that although transfigurative naming as a play practice was sometimes in dialogue with children's literature, it also existed independently of it, drawing on other sources including scripture, local heritage and foreign travel. Thirdly, the article assesses the ways transfigurative names were inflected by class and gender, and by colonial and imperial discourses. Fourthly, it is argued that there were some striking commonalities in transfigurative naming across a range of discursive contexts, and that these may have arisen in part from developmental imperatives. The article concludes by locating transfigurative naming within the wider context of children's place-naming practices and assesses the scope for, and methodological challenges awaiting, further historical and contemporary research into children's toponyms.

TRANSFIGURATIVE NAMING IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Transfigurative naming has been a common trope of children's literature since the late nineteenth century.[33] The best-known example is Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* and its sequels. Ransome's child protagonists invent a complex transfigurative toponymy for landscape features around a lake that fuses elements of Windermere and Coniston Water (UK). Among these names are Rio, Darien, the Amazon, High Greenland and Kanchenjunga.

Ransome's highly influential *oeuvre* has often been studied as an adult projection of childhood, but this simplifies a more complex, evolving dynamic. It did not take long, for example, before child authors began to adopt and adapt Ransome's transfigurative toponymy to their own ends. A remarkable example is Katherine Hull and Pamela Whitlock's *The Far Distant Oxus* (1937), written when the authors were in their mid teens. They met at boarding school, discovering a shared love of

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[33] Richard Jefferies' *Bevis: The Story of a Boy* (1882) was an early example, perhaps influencing Arthur Ransome. See Bird, *Class, Leisure and National Identity in British Children's Literature*, 97-99.

Ransome's novels, and decided to write a story of their own, 'by children, for children, about children'.[34] As in *Swallows and Amazons*, the protagonists of *The Far Distant Oxus* are teenagers who explore a rural English landscape free from adult supervision. They camp, construct a hut and a treehouse and navigate a raft down a river. However, whereas Ransome's novels are based around sailing, Hull and Whitlock substitute ponies for boats. The imagined terrain of the novel is again closely comparable to *Swallows and Amazons*, with an endpaper map that overlays transfigurative names onto a rural English base layer, retaining some names drawn from the latter. The toponyms are even more exotic, relative to an English readership, than those used by Ransome: Peran Wisa, Siestan, Aderbijan, Mount Elbruz, the River Oxus. In another sense Hull and Whitlock's toponymy was more restrained than Ransome's, in that all their names are drawn from a single region, the Middle East. The source of these names was Matthew Arnold's narrative poem *Sohrab and Rustum* (1853), which Hull and Whitlock had read at school with their teacher Margaret Mary.[35]

It would be easy to assume that transfigurative naming was a purely literary phenomenon, but the boundaries between literature and life, representation and experience are porous. As Keira Vaclavik observes, 'what children read… clearly has a huge influence on the games they play'.[36] In relation to *Swallows and Amazons*, Fiona Maine and Alison Waller's study of adult and child readers found that children's play in real rural spaces was sometimes informed by Ransome's fictions. Adult reader Tom 'redrew a map of our part of the Gower (where we used to holiday each year) in a similar way' to Ransome's map, while adult reader Nicki 'created a game of re-enacting the story as a child which transformed her real rural environment into an adventurous camp where she and her best friend

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[34] Watson, By children, about children, for children, 56. See also Bird, *Class, Leisure and National Identity in British Children's Literature*, 99.

[35] Placement Corner: The Pamela Whitlock Archive, https://www.sevenstories.org.uk/blog/placement-corner-the-pamela-whitlock-archive last accessed 5 February 2020.

[36] Vaclavik, The dress of the book, 65.

might be attacked at any time'.[37] The influence could also work the other way. *The Far Distant Oxus* appears not only to have been based on Ransome and Arnold, but also on Hull's family holidays on Exmoor.[38] Ironically, Ransome himself suppressed the extent to which he drew on his own observations of the children of family friends in creating the Walker siblings who are the principal protagonists of *Swallows and Amazons*, as Karen Babayan has demonstrated. In 1928 the Altounyan family spent the summer sailing with Ransome in the Lake District. Ransome and Ernest Altounyan bought two boats, *Swallow* and *Mavis*, for the five Altounyan children, four of whose names Ransome would use for the fictional Walkers – Susan, Mavis (known in the family as Titty), Roger and Brigit. When *Swallows and Amazons* was published two years later it included a dedication to 'the six for whom it was written in exchange for a pair of slippers', referring to the Altounyans' farewell present. However, this dedication was removed from later editions, and Ransome's autobiography implicitly reverses the direction of influence, claiming that the Altounyan children 'had identified themselves… with my characters'. It has been claimed that as the fame of Ransome's characters grew, he became 'over-protective' about their originality.[39] Evidently, while the representation of childhood in adult-authored fiction is always necessarily a construction, this construction may seek systematically to obscure how far it has itself been shaped and constructed by extra-textual events and circumstances. We should therefore be cautious about assuming that fictional children's geographies, including aspects such as transfigurative naming, can be safely bracketed as 'literary'. It is more appropriate to endorse the value of the open-ended, processual approach to understanding the ongoing co-

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[37] F. Maine and A. Waller, Swallows and Amazons forever: how adults and children engage in reading a classic text, *Children's Literature in Education* 42 (2011) 361.

[38] K. Hull and P. Whitlock, *The Far Distant Oxus*, Edinburgh, 2008, iii.

[39] Karen Babayan, *Swallows and Armenians*, Leeds, 2019; A. Flood, Swallows and Armenians: Arthur Ransome's forgotten inspirations revealed, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/mar/09/swallows-and-armenians-arthur-ransomes-forgotten-inspirations-revealed last accessed 5 February 2020.

production between authors and readers of literary maps and toponyms advocated by Cooper, Priestnall and Pavlik.

TRANSFIGURATIVE NAMING IN CHILDREN'S PLAY

The toponyms children invent and use while playing are elusive even in contemporary settings. Identifying sources that can yield information about specific historical toponymic practices such as transfigurative naming is still more difficult. Indeed, I only became aware of transfigurative naming in a non-fictional context as a by-product of another research project, on the experience of rural landscape in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England.[40] The project was based on a survey of English life writing, from which sixty-five diaries, memoirs and related sources were selected for intensive study. Ten happened to contain information about children's toponymy; of these, transfigurative naming or cognate practices featured in three. These three accounts, supplemented by another identified during a prior research project, form the basis for the analysis that follows. The first is the holiday and wartime diary of Jane Holmes, written between 1936 and 1950 but available only in the excerpted version published as *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire* in 2007. Holmes was born around 1923 and grew up in the village of Bemerton, near Salisbury, Wiltshire, in a prosperous farming family. She received what seems to have been a good education at St Swithun's boarding school, Winchester, and the highly developed transfigurative toponymy recorded in her diaries reflects her familiarity with canonical adult literature.[41] The second account is Mary Bright Rix's memoir of her north Berkshire childhood in the last few years of the nineteenth century, published as *Boars Hill Oxford* in 1970. She came from a similar comfortable middle-class background to Holmes but drew on quite different, non-literary sources for her transfigurative names, in particular foreign travel.[42] The third source I will analyse in detail is an extract from William Hallam's unpublished diaries, which span

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[40] J. Burchardt, *Lifescapes: Towards a Deep History of Landscape*, Cambridge, forthcoming.

[41] J. Holmes, *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire: A Diary of Farming and Nature 1936 - 1950*, Salisbury, 2007.

[42] M.B. Rix, *Boars Hill Oxford*, Abingdon, 1970. This is the supplementary source identified during a previous research project.

the years 1889 to 1952. In contrast to Holmes and Rix, Hallam's origins were thoroughly plebeian. He spent his childhood in the small village of Lockinge, Berkshire, the son of a stud groom, and was employed for most of his life as a fitter at the Great Western Railway works in Swindon, Wiltshire. His diaries provide an opportunity to assess transfigurative naming and the spatial practices associated with it in relation, on the one hand, to his working-class background and on the other to imperial and colonial discourses and to gender.[43] My fourth and final major source is the 1899 guidebook *Dartmoor with its Surroundings* by the Devon antiquarian and genealogist Beatrix Cresswell. Amplified by the diaries she kept between 1899 and 1940, this sheds light on the surprising commonalities evident in transfigurative naming, despite the widely divergent discursive and spatial contexts in which it occurred, suggesting that affective and developmental influences played a significant role in its genesis.[44]

In addition to transfigurative naming, three other terms are necessary to analyse the toponymy emergent from these sources. 'Public names' are those in common use in the local adult community. By the late nineteenth century, these were usually administrative names used by local authorities and statutory bodies such as the Ordnance Survey, although vernacular names only current in the local area were (and are) still used.[45] Conversely, 'private names' are those invented by individuals, families or groups. Dorothy and William Wordsworth, for example, named places after family members such as their brother John: 'John's Grove' and 'John's Path' are mentioned in Dorothy's *Grasmere Journal*.[46] Several of the sources identified during the project on English life writing mentioned above feature private names derived from an obvious geographical feature of the place in question, referred to as

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[43] Hallam diaries, Berkshire Record Office, Reading [hereafter BRO], D/EX 1415.

[44] B.F. Cresswell, *Dartmoor, and its Surroundings: What to See and How to Find it*, London, 1899 and B.F. Cresswell, diaries, Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter [hereafter DRO], 4686M/F/36-78.

[45] F.A. Twaroch, C.B. Jones and A.I. Abdelmoty, *Acquisition of Vernacular Place Names from Web Sources*, Berlin, 2009. See also Ordnance Survey, Vernacular geography: what's in a name? https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/blog/2010/07/whats-in-a-name/ last accessed 5 February 2020.

[46] M. Gilleland, Sad ravages in the woods, http://laudatortemporisacti.blogspot.com/2008/01/sad-ravages-in-woods.html last accessed 26 November 2019.

'topographic names' here. Margaret Hutchinson's *Childhood in Edwardian Sussex* (1981), for example, mentions various names she and her brothers gave to local places, including 'The Bluebell Seat' and, for a path between overhanging trees, 'The Rabbit Hole'.[47] The Hampshire naturalist Katherine Spear Smith called a place near her Titchfield home 'Willow Corner', while the Bristol bookseller Fred Catley refers in his diaries to 'the spot we have christened "The Magpies"'.[48] Oddly, perhaps, few functional toponyms of the affordances type noted by Hart and Moore seem to occur in modern English life writing. This may reflect an under-representation of early and even middle childhood in historical diaries and memoirs. While some diaries (such as William Hallam's) begin in late childhood or youth, very few that begin earlier have found their way into public repositories. Similarly, it is possible that writers of memoirs recollect better, or are more interested in, the specificities of their experiences in late rather than early childhood.

The first major source I will analyse in relation to transfigurative naming, Jane Holmes's *Footloose in South Wiltshire*, consists of diary entries mainly concerned with nature observation. This may well in part reflect editorial selection by Holmes, since her motivation for publication was deep concern at the ecological destruction she perceived around her:

> It was seeing the despoliation of these meadows and the surrounding countryside, along with a huge loss of birds and flowers, that finally aroused me to seek publication for these diaries (which had lain at the back of a cupboard for half a century).[49]

However, the selected entries also bear witness to a rich, complex childhood toponymy, developed between Jane, her half-sister Alison and their friends, who were apparently 'free to wander' across an area of land about a mile deep and two miles long between Bemerton, Quidhampton, Netherhampton

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[47] M.M. Hutchinson, *Childhood in Edwardian Sussex: The Making of a Naturalist*, Hindhead, 1983, 63.
[48] Nature notebooks, 10 April 1916, Katherine Spear Smith papers, Hampshire Record Office, Winchester, 19M99/2/9; Diary, 27 December 1933, Fred Catley papers, Bristol Archives, 41419/24.
[49] Holmes, *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire*, vii.

and West Harnham.[50] A few public names are used – Gypsy Lane, Hunt's Down, Spring Bridge, Stratford Meadows – but there are many more private names. Some of these are topographic, among them 'Broken Bridges', '14 Hatches' (Fig. 1) and 'Wild Duck Islands'. These are largely self-explanatory but do reveal something of the children's preoccupations and concerns, as well as the affordances of the Bemerton watermeadows: the difficulty and excitement of crossing a broken bridge, the children's interest, even at that age, in wildlife, and the prominence of water in their games and imagination.

Fig. 1. 'I spotted a Dipper at 14 Hatches, 25 November 1942'. Source: used with permission from Jane Holmes, *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire. A Diary of Farming and Nature, 1936-1950*, Salisbury, 2007, 35.

More striking are the transfigurative names, among them 'Paradise', 'The Gateway to Paradise', 'Arcadia', 'The River of Life', 'The Isle of Avalon' and 'Merlin's Bridge'. These express a sense of enchantment that is reflected in many of the more extended descriptive and narrative passages. 'The Gateway to Paradise' (Fig. 2) was a bridge across a stream or river, on the far side of which lay 'Paradise', meadows that were evidently a 'special place' for Jane and Alison in the sense identified by Heft, Sobel and Ross: places of the children's own discovery and making, untrammelled by adult supervision or intrusion. When they crossed 'The Gateway to Paradise', they entered a space in which

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[50] Holmes, *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire*, vi-vii.

they seem to have been free to do whatever they wanted – to explore, investigate, observe, read or swim. Recalling these pleasures six decades later, Holmes wrote:

> My half-sister Alison, myself and our friends, bird-nested, caught tiddlers in jam jars and crayfish and hammerheads in our cupped hands. We got wet in flooded meadows, climbed trees and canoed to distant islands. In retrospect it was sheer unadulterated bliss![51]

Fig. 2. 'The Gateway to Paradise'. Source: used with permission from Jane Holmes, *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire*, 34.

Indeed, it is, perhaps, only 'in retrospect' that Jane and Alison's bliss was 'sheer' and 'unadulterated'. The narrative arc created by the selection of entries and by the authorial retrospect that precedes them works to establish parallel lost Edens of childhood play and of a farming ecology still untarnished by agribusiness. It is hard to believe that while they were in 'Paradise', the children never quarrelled, got stung, bruised or cut or suffered other adversities. But although the childhood experience was doubtless more complex than the nostalgic adult memory, many of the activities Holmes recalls so fondly, including swimming, bird-nesting and tree-climbing, recur frequently in the diary entries and

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[51] Holmes, *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire*, vii.

in the accompanying photographs. Furthermore, the toponyms the children bestowed on these places themselves bear eloquent testimony to this sense of enchantment. As it happens, Holmes was not the only child to find a 'special place' she regarded as paradise in the Wiltshire countryside around this time. Ida Gandy's memoir, *A Wiltshire Childhood* (1929), refers to a period perhaps half a century earlier but uses similar language to describe a 'paradise' immediately adjoining her home:

> Whether it was because of this fig tree, or of the heavenly blue of the larkspurs, or the saintliness of the lilies, or the sweet drowsy warmth that seemed imprisoned in this little garden, I do not know, but it always represented Paradise in my imagination, and I walked in it sedately, smelling the roses, thinking pleasant, secret thoughts that I would share with no one....[52]

The transfigurative names in Holmes's diary inscribe a remarkable mix of discursive influences, notably the Bible, Arthurian legend, classical mythology and pastoral literature. But the source of a toponym should not be equated with its appeal to the children who use it. Just as Jones observes that children can operate 'under the cover' of adult projections, so they may also selectively adopt elements of adult discourse for use in the construction of the 'child culture' mooted by Hart and Moore. On the one hand, then, the prominence of religion in Holmes's toponymy certainly reflected her family's serious approach to church attendance: 'The only restriction placed on me was that of punctuality at meal times and a tidy appearance for Matins on Sundays'.[53] On the other, even had they restricted themselves to the Bible, Jane, Alison and their friends would have had hundreds of names to choose from. Their choice of 'Paradise' and 'The River of Life' is indicative of what they did in, and how they felt about, the outdoor spaces they frequented.

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[52] I. Gandy, *A Wiltshire Childhood*, London, 1929, 32.
[53] Holmes, *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire*, vii.

The 'river of life', as it would have been expounded in Bemerton church, referred to the eternal life God's grace bestowed. But while the connotations of refreshment and joy carry across, the life-giving experiences the river and its environs afforded Jane and Alison, and which presumably informed their choice of toponym, were rather different: hedonic freedom to do things like read *The Beano* (an irreverent comic far removed from the virtues enjoined on them every Sunday at Matins), when and where they wanted (Fig. 3), and the thoroughly embodied, frequently experienced pleasure of swimming in the crystal clear chalk stream waters of the river itself.

Fig. 3. 'Alison reading the Beano on the hatch over the River of Life, 2 May 1941'. Source: used with permission from Jane Holmes, *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire*, 34.

The Arthurian toponyms mentioned in the diary – 'Merlin's Bridge' and 'The Isle of Avalon' – have slightly different connotations. They evoke magic, mystery and the unattainable, since Avalon was, of course, unreachable by ordinary mortals. This suggests another aspect of 'child culture' in mid twentieth-century Bemerton: exploration and adventure rather than security and freedom. At the same time, the adoption of names drawn from myth and legend provides support for Philo's emphasis on the significance of 'memories, imaginations and reveries' in childhood play and Ross's suggestion that allowing children to navigate outdoor environments unsupervised can 'set [their] imaginations

free'.[54] Since adults typically engage with landscape in purposive, instrumental ways, or at least with conscious intention (in admiring a view, for example), there are indications of a pronounced divergence between adults' and children's landscape dispositions here.

The third major source of Holmes's toponymy appears to be classical mythology – what, after all, could be more classical than Arcadia (Fig. 4)? However, there is also a more specific local context here. Wilton House, just across the park wall from Bemerton, was believed to be where the Elizabethan pastoral poet Sir Philip Sidney composed his prose romance *Arcadia* (1590).[55] The name therefore points both towards the 'arcadian' pleasure of adult-free open air play and towards an episode of local history that was part of public memory and community identity. While Jones is surely right that '[c]hildren do not readily adopt the generic identity thrust upon them [by adults]', 'child culture' can harmonize with some elements of adult culture even as it resists or repurposes others.

Fig. 4. 'Snow in Arcadia, 7 January 1941'. Source: used with permission from Jane Holmes, *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire*, 35.

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[54] Philo, 'To go back up the side hill', 18-19; Ross, 'My journey to school …', 832-833.

[55] Wilton House, in: M. Drabble, J. Stringer and D. Hahn (Eds), *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Oxford, 2007 http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199214921.001.0001/acref-9780199214921-e-6617.

My second example of transfigurative naming is taken from Mary Bright Rix's history of Boars Hill, five miles south-west of Oxford. Among the personal reminiscences are some interesting toponyms. One of these pertains to a line of trees saved from felling by the noted archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans. 'As children', Rix observes, 'we called this wood "the Black Forest"'. Rix's grandmother called the path over to The Fox public house from Norman Bank 'Italy', due to its golden gorse and fine views. Another local place name was 'Swiss Cottage'.[56] This appears to have been a public name but does suggest how adult public and children's private naming practices can intersect and resonate. All three names evoke the landscapes of European Romanticism and the Grand Tour. In contrast to Holmes's diary and, for that matter, the toponymic and cartographic practices clustered around *Swallows and Amazons*, there are no obvious literary references. However, the sense of freedom and idyll Rix evokes is very similar to that found in *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire*. Boars Hill in her childhood was, Rix tells us, 'a wild common of heather and furze', a 'delectable spot'. Like Holmes, she emphasizes the games local children played in the landscape. Again, as with Holmes, who resided in Bemerton only during the vacations for most of her childhood, Rix's Boars Hill was strongly associated with leisure since the family moved there after having 'spent our summers in a cottage' in the village for a number of years.[57] Although the transfigurative naming in Rix's account is less paradisal than in Holmes's, there is a similar sense of entering a separate, secluded world in which different rules apply – as if you had suddenly found yourself in Germany, Italy or Switzerland, indeed. This feeling of spatial remoteness is amplified, in Rix's adult recollections of what the Hill's landscapes had meant to her, by a corresponding sense of how remote they seemed in time. She recalls the Hill of her childhood as 'isolated', 'untouched' and cut off from the modern world, musing over the Saxon origins of its public names and the possible

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[56] Rix, *Boars Hill Oxford*, 6, 8. Norman Bank was the name of a local cottage.
[57] Rix, *Boars Hill Oxford*, 5, 8.

existence of a Roman kiln.[58] Above all, the Hill was 'ancient', a word Rix uses in relation to the local landscape ten times in her thirty-page memoir, particularly in connection with its paths and trackways:

> I know a track at Harrowdown which was probably first marked out by prehistoric animals coming down to the river for the evening drink. Boars Hill is seamed with such ancient tracks.[59]

Stepping out onto the 'wild common' of Boars Hill was evidently, in her eyes, to leave the quotidian adult world behind, in the same way that Holmes did when she went through 'The Gateway to Paradise'. This echoes Honeyman's emphasis on the crucial significance of entrances and exits in the spaces of children's fiction, and Mendlesohn's concept of portal-quest fantasies. Yet Honeyman's attempt to explain the prominence of portals by invoking the adult need to keep the 'totalized' world of childhood securely separate while being able to access it in the imagination fails to account for the construction of such entrances and exits in landscapes 'by children, for children', as is explicitly the case in Holmes's transfigurative naming and implicitly so in Rix's.

For both Holmes and Rix, then, transfigurative names corresponded to places that, despite being easily accessible on foot from their homes, they perceived in childhood as wild and untamed, and which therefore offered exciting opportunities for exploration and adventure. Yet there were significant differences in their toponymic practice which seem to have reflected different family cultures, themselves perhaps relating to distinct cultural identities within the middle class, with Holmes coming from a highly literary, Anglican household and Rix a nonconformist business family whose wealth was of recent origin.[60] In the remainder of this article, I will pursue the question of the class bearings of

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[58] Rix, *Boars Hill Oxford*, 5.

[59] Rix, *Boars Hill Oxford*, 7.

[60] Holmes, *Foot Loose in South Wiltshire*, vii; Rix, *Boars Hill Oxford*, 8-9. See also Boars Hill Association, Notable residents: Mary Bright Rix, https://boarshill.info/mary-bright-rix/ last accessed 5 February 2020.

transfigurative naming further, assess its relationship to discourses of empire and gender and consider how far it may also have had non-discursive, developmental sources.

CLASS, EMPIRE, GENDER AND TRANSFIGURATIVE NAMING

Although from a very different social background to Holmes and Rix, William Hallam's diaries reveal some striking similarities in his relationship to the local landscape. This is reflected in his toponymy, which, although it does not feature any fully developed examples of transfigurative naming, has much in common with it, as well as some interesting differences. Just as with Holmes and Rix, and, for that matter, as represented in *Swallows and Amazons* or *The Far Distant Oxus*, Hallam's experience of landscape in late childhood and youth was immersive, collective and hidden from adults. This can best be demonstrated by summarising his remarkable diary entry for 5th April 1890. Although Hallam was twenty-two by this time, he was home from London for a week's holiday and seems to have slipped back easily into childhood routines and practices.[61] What emerges most clearly is his intimate knowledge of the local landscape, derived from walking every possible route within it time without number through childhood. He writes that he used regularly to fetch butter from Porter's Farm when a school boy. He knows the old farmhouse Collins Close so well he can describe the precise location of the brass plaque recording the date the Collins family moved in. He knows where the first springs bubble out of the chalk marl at Upper Betterton Farm and points out a tree planted by Princess Louise 'just by Betterton Pillars, down the road'.[62]

Collective search and discovery, in this case with his friend Lex Whittle, is a second pronounced theme of this diary entry. The two young men look for ducks' nests and then find 'sportive trouts' and a blackbird's nest in the 'Lower Close'. Following this they have a 'bit of a hunt after a wren' in the hollow

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[61] Hallam diaries, 5 April 1890, BRO, D/EX 1415/1A.
[62] Compare Gandy, *A Wiltshire Childhood*, 141: 'We knew every lonely barn, every hatchway, every dip of the downs for miles round our home…'.

'which is always known as "Black Snail"'. The dense undergrowth through which the young men push evokes a sense of mystery comparable to Holmes's 'Isle of Avalon' or Rix's prehistoric Harrowdown:

> In that part of the Close which is opposite Collin's [sic] Kitchen Garden the vegetation is very rank and here I should think a likely place to view a Jack O Lantern. It is very marshy and in places impenetrable. If we had had our likenesses taken here, any one [from] London would have thought we were out in the jungle.[63]

While these elements of immersive, intimate knowledge, collective exploration and secrecy or seclusion are almost equally pronounced in the way Holmes and Rix related to their local landscapes in childhood, Hallam's toponymy is more distinctive. Unlike the middle-class writers, he is keen to invoke vernacular names such as Collins Close and Black Snail. These appear to possess an imaginative aura for him but they are community rather than private names. Although it would be unwise to generalize from one individual, this prompts the question of whether working-class children may typically have been more deeply embedded in their communities than their middle-class peers.[64]

Hallam's reference to the 'jungle' also warrants discussion. In the context of late nineteenth-century Britain, it inevitably has colonial and imperialist connotations, prompting comparison with transfigurative names reported by the AHAS such as 'the Khyber Pass', 'Lake Titicaca' and 'Popocatepetl'. Memoirs of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rural childhoods often use analogous language to describe outdoor play, as in Ida Gandy's vivid account:

> At a very early age we had of course decided to be explorers…. Clad in overalls of blue serge, with scarlet fisher-caps on our heads and long pointed poles in our hands, away we would go each afternoon in search of the discoveries and adventures. Never did a grown-up explorer's

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[63] Hallam diaries, 5 April 1890, BRO, D/EX 1415/1A.
[64] See the discussion of participatory selfhood in working-class autobiography in R. Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-representation in Britain, 1832-1920*, New York, 1991, 54.

rapture over a Lake Nyanza or an Amazon exceed ours when first we found a new sheep-pond,

or stood on the banks of a new stream, or climbed a fresh hill.[65]

Similarly, Margaret Hutchinson decided one day 'to dig down to Australia', while Frank Kendon

recalled that 'though meadows were our counties, and parishes our nations, our little world was quite

large enough to get lost in'.[66] Likewise, Henry Warren wrote of the migrant hop-pickers he

encountered as a child that '[i]f I had been suddenly conveyed to the Bermudas, I could not have been

more entranced than I was by these gay and vivacious people'.[67] Such idioms reflect the increasing

exposure of young people to imperialist discourse. The Revised Code of 1882 had made the colonies

part of the state elementary school curriculum at Standard 6, while school textbooks encouraged

colonial emigration, and photographs and models of tropical landscapes were deployed as teaching

aids.[68] Meanwhile, literate children could scarcely escape the plethora of adventure-themed books by

writers like R.M. Ballantyne and G.A. Henty, and best-selling magazines like *The Boy's Own Paper*.[69]

The influence of colonialist and imperialist discourses on transfigurative naming raises the question of

how far it should be construed as a manifestation of the domineering, conquest-oriented 'imperial

geographic imagination' that Bird sees as one of the principal modes of adult-authored children's

literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[70] In considering this, it is crucial to

recognize the very different positioning of children from the adult explorers and conquerors they

sometimes sought to emulate. Socially and politically privileged adults could not only assert but

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[65] Gandy, *A Wiltshire Childhood*, 140-141.

[66] Hutchinson, *Childhood in Edwardian Sussex*; F. Kendon, *The Small Years*, Cambridge, 1930, 2.

[67] C.H. Warren, *A Boy in Kent*, London, 1937, 51.

[68] A.M.C. Maddrell, Empire, emigration and school geography: changing discourses of Imperial citizenship, 1880–1925, *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (1996) 373-387; T. Ploszajska, Constructing the subject: geographical models in English schools, 1870–1944, *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (1996) 388-398; J.M. Schwartz, The Geography Lesson: photographs and the construction of imaginative geographies, *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (1996) 16-45.

[69] R. Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure*, London, 1997; J. Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World*, London, 2015.

[70] Bird, *Class, Leisure and National Identity in British Children's Literature*, 87-112.

enforce claims over territory, but children could not – hence, in part, the secluded, marginal and private spaces in which transfigurative naming often took place. Nor did children's outdoor play offer opportunities to achieve domination over colonized 'others'. However, children's use of the language of the 'imperial geographic imagination' did allow them to imagine themselves as powerful, dominant and conquering. As such, it may have been a means for children to contest and resist their ongoing structural disempowerment and marginalization. This is particularly relevant to the otherwise perhaps surprising adoption of the 'imperial geographic imagination' by girls such as Gandy and Hutchinson, or the thirteen year old Katherine Spear Smith, who styled herself 'Admiral Spear' after a distinguished naval forebear.[71] In acting out these imaginative projections, girls were also implicitly rejecting the current and future gender roles assigned to them.

Nevertheless, the role of the imperial geographic imagination within transfigurative naming should not be overstated. While children growing up in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain were heavily exposed to imperialist discourse, as Jonathan Rose has argued this does not necessarily imply the adoption of imperialist values.[72] Hallam is a telling example. In later life, despite his Conservative politics, he passionately opposed imperialism, as a diary entry recording the end of the Boer War testifies:

> Peace – at last no one was more pleased with the finish than I was, yet some of the jingoes must come jeering at me… I told them all I glory in the attitude I have taken all along, with regard to this damndable [sic] capitalistic war.[73]

Recalling Jones's emphasis on children's resistance to the identities adults 'thrust upon them', and Hart's claim that child-culture 'generates some of its own categories of meaning', it may be suggested

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[71] Katherine Spear Smith, diary, 1898, Papers of Alic Halford Smith, New College (Oxford) Archives, PA SMA 1/5.

[72] J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, London, 2002, 334-352.

[73] Hallam diaries, 2 June 1902, BRO, D/EX 1415/5.

once again that rather than being empty vessels into which adult culture is poured, children engage with it more dynamically and selectively, adapting elements of it to their own purposes. More important than conquest or domination to most children seems to have been exploration of their home range. Such exploration was sometimes described, as by Hallam and Gandy, in the language of the imperial geographic imagination, but other registers deriving from quite different discursive contexts were equally often used: Arthurian legends, the Bible, local history or European holidays. In practice, the key feature was discovery of the local landscape through progressive extension of the home range.[74] This outward exploration enacted a more fundamental process of inward discovery and self-development, aspects that emerge particularly clearly in Beatrix Cresswell's *Dartmoor with its Surroundings* (1899).

THE ROOTS OF TRANSFIGURATIVE NAMING

In key passages in her book, Cresswell looks back on her childhood experiences of Dartmoor. As with the extract from Hallam's diary, these do not feature fully developed examples of transfigurative naming, but there are revealing similarities in the emotional and associative pattern, especially with regard to the dialectic between exploration and security, wilderness and home. Central to this in Cresswell's case was her relationship with her father, the Reverend Richard Cresswell, to whom she was devoted.

In the book's opening chapter Cresswell invokes a similar sense of mystery and enchantment to that expressed in the diaries and memoirs previously considered:

The writer of this book can remember, when a little child, being taken by her father nearly every day to see it [Dartmoor] in the distance, and being told that when she was old enough

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[74] For Bird the regional geographic imagination was also centrally concerned with discovering the local landscape, but by almost opposite means: disciplined, systematic survey work, rather than the unsupervised hedonistic wandering described by Holmes, Rix, Hallam and Gandy. Bird, *Class, Leisure and National Identity in British Children's Literature*, 87.

she should go to the 'Blue Hills', a promise duly fulfilled, and begetting that love of the Moor
which never perishes…. Perhaps you left the throbbing heart of England, the most populous
city in the world, this morning; and a journey of not many hours has brought you into the
loneliest and wildest part of the country, so untameable, so unchangeable, that the dweller
of bygone days, did he return, would probably find but little alteration in the lapse of
centuries.[75]

Of particular interest here is Cresswell's reference to Dartmoor as the 'Blue Hills', evidently her own
childhood toponym. This dates it to the 1860s or 1870s, too early to echo Housman's well-known
phrase from *A Shropshire Lad* ('those blue remembered hills'), although Leigh Hunt's 'The Story of
Rimini' ('And distant snatches of blue hills between') is a possible source.[76] Cresswell's emphasis on
Dartmoor as distant, lonely, wild, untameable and primitive draws on established romantic discourses
of heath and moorland such as the opening chapter of Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*
(1878). In applying these tropes to Dartmoor, she played a minor role in its construction as a literary
region, developing the more diffuse Romanticism of earlier writers like Sophie Dixon and Sabine
Baring-Gould, and anticipating the defining contributions of Eden Phillpotts' Dartmoor cycle (1898-
1923) and Conan-Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902).[77] But Cresswell's work also had a more
urgent, personal context. She was writing, in fact, for three kinds of traveller: not only the reader of
the guidebook whom she ostensibly addresses, but for her own adult self, seeking to journey back to
the world of her childhood in the hope of finding 'but little alteration' in the lapse of time, and thirdly
for her child self, looking out at the 'Blue Hills' from the other side of the divide, anticipating their
promise of unknown future possibilities. Dartmoor in Cresswell's childhood evidently constituted a

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[75] B.F. Cresswell, *Dartmoor, and its Surroundings: What to See and How to Find it*, London, 1899, 9-
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[76] A.E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*, London, 1896; L. Hunt, *The Story of Rimini, a Poem*, London,
1816.

[77] S. Dixon, *A Journal of Ten Days' Excursion on the Western and Northern Borders of Dartmoor*,
Plymouth, 1830; S. Baring-Gould, *Dartmoor Idylls*, London, 1896.

separate, secluded world analogous to Rix's prehistoric Harrowdown, Hallam's 'jungle' and Holmes's 'Paradise'.

Yet just as Holmes cannot have left all her troubles behind when she went through 'the Gateway to Paradise', and Rix's wild common cannot always have been 'delectable', the simplifying nostalgia of Cresswell's adult account obscures the more complex and indeed ambivalent affective significance the 'Blue Hills' seem to have held for her in childhood. A second extract from *Dartmoor* provides a quite remarkable glimpse of these complexities. This is an account of a walk with an unnamed companion to Cranmere Pool, 'the dreariest, most untameable spot in England', in late childhood or youth. The companion may have been her father, since we know they visited the moor together and that it was a special place for them. Certainly her companion, whoever he was, stood in a protective, fatherly relationship to her:

> progress became every moment more difficult. The ground is rent into fissures in every direction by the ever present moisture and frequent streams. From tussock to tussock of heathery bent we had to leap, often going out of the way to find some spot narrow enough to cross, the soft black soil some depth below not looking inviting for the feet…. I presently grew quite exhausted; we knew the pool must be quite close to us, yet could not find it. My companion proposed that I should rest while he made a further cast round for the place. Tying a handkerchief to my alpenstock and setting it up as a landmark, he left me.
>
> I shall never forget my impression of the utter loneliness that seemed to gather over the moor – as far as I could see only dark swampy soil; the very heather seemed no colour in that dreary hollow. I could see no distance, and the great tors seemed to shut me in. A desperate wish to get up and run away seized me, yet I dared not stir for fear my companion should lose me altogether; and how long he seemed gone!

My anticipations of being lost were not altogether unfounded, for after lighting upon the pool he failed for some time to find his way back to the point where he had left me, so vast and trackless is the spot.[78]

Cresswell's fear of the 'utter loneliness' of the moor, of being lost in its 'vast and trackless' spaces, teeters on the verge of an abyss of terror. There is here an intensely personal experience: the imprint of Cresswell's particular psychological configuration is vividly apparent through the more general discursive formulations. The expedition to Cranmere Pool was, it seems, a cathartic experience: Cresswell goes to the 'Blue Hills', with their mysterious augury of the future, and is swallowed up in their terrifying wildness, before being reunited with her protective, fatherly companion. This enacts and resolves what is perhaps the fundamental crux of childhood: the need to grow away from parents, and the fear of losing them this provokes.[79]

Yet losing a parent was just what fate held in store for Cresswell: her beloved father died suddenly when she was only twenty. This devastating blow reverberated down the years. More than half a century later she wrote, on the anniversary of his death, of 'the dismals of this hateful day'.[80] In adult life she often returned to Dartmoor, as if trying to reconnect with him, a theme painfully apparent also in her published work, much of which was concerned with Devon churches and clergymen. In the introduction to *Dartmoor*, she tells us that her love for the moor 'never perishes' but that it is:

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[78] Cresswell, *Dartmoor, and its Surroundings*, 54-55.

[79] The anxieties and psychological injuries separation from parents cause are the principal concern of psychologists working in the attachment tradition. See, for example, M. Rutter, *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*, Harmondsworth, 1972.

[80] Cresswell, diaries, 14 April 1938, DRO, 4686M/F/75.

another task to write for you the story the Moorland tells. It is like attempting to describe

beloved features, or coldly summing up the character of our dearest, whose faults are known,

yet condoned for very love.[81]

Dartmoor here seems to have fused with memories of her father: it is the place that tells her, death

notwithstanding, she cannot ultimately be separated from him. Perhaps this indicates, in intensified

form, the psychological kernel of transfigurative naming – the need to venture away from the security

of home towards the distant horizons represented by the 'Blue Hills', but also the paradoxical

dependence of this venturing on the security provided by home and the relationships that constitute

it.

CONCLUSION

Why do children give their own names to places? At the simplest level, children like adults need ways

of referring to places that matter to them. Landscape features valued by children, such as climbable

trees, often lack adult names. As Hart, Heft and Ross have emphasized, children's spaces are often

minutely differentiated, and need to be named as such. Furthermore, children may not know adult

names even where they do exist. These considerations, however, do not explain the use of

transfigurative as opposed to functional, topographic names. Transfigurative naming appears to arise

where places are familiar yet retain an aura of the exotic, as in Holmes's Bemerton watermeadows

and Rix's Boars Hill; encountered on holidays or excursions (all four of my examples); discovered and

used by children alone (Holmes, Rix and Hallam); and at least apparently secret and unknown to adults

(especially true of Holmes and Hallam). In the last two respects, transfigurative naming closely

resembles the play practices Sobel describes in relation to dens, forts and play houses. However,

transfigurative names seem to apply to much more extensive landscapes and spatial features. They

are also typically outward rather than inward looking, referencing distant, overseas places and arising

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[81] Cresswell, *Dartmoor, and its Surroundings*, 9.

in the context of children exploring and extending the boundaries of their home range. These differences may be age-related. The inward looking secret places identified by Sobel were, he argued, characteristic of middle childhood, whereas the transfigurative names considered here seem mainly to have arisen in late childhood and youth. This reflects continuities in modes of engaging with rural landscapes, in Holmes's and Hallam's diaries for example, into the authors' late teens and early twenties, underlining the artificial, constructed character of definitions of 'childhood'. Admittedly, the retrospective life-writing evidence used in this paper lacks chronological precision, so the age coordinates of transfigurative naming remain somewhat speculative. What does seem clear is that invented toponyms hardly ever persisted into mature adulthood.

Drawn opportunistically from children's literature, the geography of exploration, the Bible and other sources, transfigurative names such as the Black Forest, Popocatepetl, the River Oxus, the jungle or the Isle of Avalon lent enchantment to otherwise ordinary landscapes such as local fields, woods and streams while expressing the numinous quality such landscapes could acquire through imaginative play.[82] At the same time, these names allowed children to achieve a measure of control over unfathomably vast worlds hovering on the verge of consciousness, by reducing them to knowable and hence manageable scales. Transfigurative names also created a shared imaginative terrain for children, which could become the substrate for further play and intragroup interaction.[83]

Importantly, the examples examined here show that transfigurative naming was a collective experience. In Cresswell's case the collective experience was with her father rather than a peer group, but in general transfigurative names seem to have constituted a kind of private language that kept adults out of children's imaginative territory. In some instances, transfigurative toponyms were indicative of powerful affective landscape experiences that influenced the subsequent trajectory of a

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[82] On the nexus between children's experience of outdoor environments, imagination and dreaming, see Philo, 'To go back up the side hill', 7-23 and Ross, 'My Journey to School …', 377-383.

[83] See Hart's observation that children's place names 'in turn influence future place use; place names become normative prescriptions for use'. Hart, *Children's Experience of Place*, 348.

child's life. Holmes's adult commitment to ecology, for example, not only shaped the way she represented her childhood engagement with landscape but was also itself shaped by these early experiences. Cresswell's fascination with the 'Blue Hills' her father pointed out to her when she was still too young to visit them ripened, years later, into the first of her many successful guidebooks, and a lifelong love of Dartmoor.

The core feature of transfigurative naming, however, appears to be that it transforms homely, familiar landscapes into exotic, unfamiliar ones. In this it is congruent both with Hart and Moore's emphasis on the proximity to home of children's preferred play spaces, and with the significance accorded to exploration and gateways into other worlds by scholars of cartography and fantasy in children's literature such as Honeyman and Mendlesohn. Transfigurative naming, then, appears to correspond to a deep-seated, fundamental dialectic in children's lives, shuttling between the need for security and the need for exploration: how the latter pulls away from, yet persistently returns to, the former because it depends upon it. It was precisely the familiarity of these landscapes – the fact that they were 'close to home' – that enabled children to find the exotic and the wild in them.

If transfigurative naming arises at least in part from developmental imperatives, there is no reason to assume it was confined to the region and time period on which this study has focused. It seems quite possible that comparable toponymic practices may have occurred in other cultural settings, for example in urban and suburban contexts, and elsewhere in the world. Transfigurative names, however, are just one form of children's toponym. There is scope for much further research, both historical and contemporary, into children's toponymic practices in a more general sense. For historians, the ephemerality, elusiveness and primarily oral transmission of children's toponyms is an obstacle, but as this article has sought to show, more can be found in memoirs, diaries and other life writing sources than might be anticipated. There are other sources too – Jane Holmes's diary shows the rich possibilities photograph albums can offer, and children's maps, drawings and scrapbooks have sometimes found their way into public repositories, although collection and preservation of material

still in private hands may be a higher priority here. For the recent history of children's toponyms, oral history offers almost unlimited opportunities, although as always researchers need to keep in mind the complexity and often opacity of the ways memory reconfigures the past. Non-historical research into children's toponyms should be easier, and could best, perhaps, proceed through emulating the participant observation methods used so successfully to explore the relationship between space and play. In this context, however, researchers would do well to heed the important but difficult research ethics problem raised by Sobel:

> Some aspects of children's experiences are better left alone.... [T]here are realms in which the adult should not trespass. If secrecy is an important element of the special place, then it is important not to pressure children into unfolding their secrets.[84]

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[84] Sobel, *Children's Special Places*, 116. Chris Philo advocates a similar minimally-interventionist approach: Philo, 'To go back up the side hill', 8.