



Nostalgia and Awareness

Representations of Childhood Nostalgia in Adolescent Literature

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“I remember my own childhood vividly
...I knew terrible things.
But I knew I mustn't let adults know I knew.
It would scare them.”

Maurice Sendak,
The New Yorker, 27 September 1993

Contents

1.	Introduction. Rupture and Continuity: Childhood Nostalgia in Children's Literature	5
2.	Theorizing Nostalgia. Reflecting on a structure of feeling	15
3.	Theorizing Childhood Nostalgia. Contemplating Otherness: Childhood Nostalgia & Children's Literature	27
4.	"This World is Not My Home." Nostalgia's many faces in Floortje Zwigman's Trilogy <i>Een groene bloem</i>	49
5.	"Some Perverse Kind of Nostalgia." Disruptive Nostalgia in Meg Rosoff's <i>How I Live Now</i>	87
6.	Conclusion. Mapping Nostalgia and Awareness: The Need for Theory	111
	Bibliography	117

1. Introduction

Rupture and Continuity: Childhood Nostalgia in Children's Literature

In Great Britain, children's literature is serious business. Both economically and intellectually. This country approaches children's books *and* its authors with a theoretical ambition that is rare to come across in the Netherlands. It is the very reason I packed my bags and said goodbye to my beloved Netherlands for a year to study children's literature in London. There are brilliant Dutch children's books. Funny books, serious books. Daring books. And no one will deny that they are 'lovely' and sometimes even 'very bright'. But text-approached analysis of children's books is not quite as common in the Netherlands as it is in Great Britain.

And now I am about to write about that problem I promised myself not to write about. Because with this thesis, I wanted, for once, to get beyond this endless discussion about whether children's literature is literary and deserves critical attention. Dutch children's literature deserves critical reflection and international attention. From this desire for a flourishing Dutch literary criticism of children's literature stems my choice to write this thesis in English. It is my personal step towards a more international-orientated field of children's literature and an attempt to draw attention to the Dutch collection of overlooked, under-theorized children's books. My desire is to read and apply theory, because I agree with Peter Hunt when he introduces his book *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature* (1991) with the phrase "Good work with children's literature depends, ultimately, on coherent and thoughtful theory." The notion that children's literature belongs in the literary field and with that occupies a place in a theoretical tradition, asks for explorers of that field. As Anita Moss already suggested in 1981: "We owe it to ourselves to explore what is going on in the field of literary criticism, even if we decide to reject it [...] we cannot decide to reject it because new theories in time change our habit of thought, and become the norm." (Moss, 1981: 25) It is for this reason that I have decided to challenge what is often described as what distinguishes and problematizes the critical approach of children's literature: childhood nostalgia. If we want to take children's literature seriously,

critical reflection on the relation between nostalgia and children's literature is imperative.

In present-day society, children remain children longer than ever before. The moment before children can independently bike to school, drink, or even use a sharp knife, all those cultural standards of maturation, has never come so late in life. The protection of the child from outside influences is fed by anxieties about the potential corruption of its innocence. Childhood is treasured. The child is spoiled and adored in a desperate attempt to keep it safe and happy.

A survey in the UK under two thousand parents demonstrates how nearly half of them would not allow their children to play hockey or ride horses due to the dangers involved. (*The Times*, 21/2/2014) In the Netherlands fewer parents let their children cycle to school, which has resulted in an increasing group of children failing their bicycle exam (*VeiligVerkeerNederland*, 10/3/2014).

The protective environment of schools is critiqued because it diminishes children's ability to evaluate risks. (*DeStandaard*, 22/3/2014) Organized around the theme *Gevaar!* (*Danger!*), the Dutch *Kinderboekenweek* 2014 (*Children's literature-week*) brought this problem on the carpet by stressing how children are part of the same, dangerous world as adults, which they can only learn to deal with when they are allowed to encounter hazardous situations -and read 'dangerous' books.

Cultural criticism relates dominant meanings ascribed to childhood in contemporary culture to nostalgia. In *The Children's Culture Reader* (1998), Henry Jenkins elaborates on this relation between the sentimental, fear-driven approach of the child and the notion that childhood is 'other':

"Too often, our culture images childhood as a utopian space, separate from adult cares and worries, free from sexuality, outside social divisions, closer to nature and the primitive world, more fluid in its identity and its access to the realms of imagination, beyond historical change, more just, more pure, and innocent, and in the end, waiting to be corrupted or protected by adults. Such a conception of the child dips freely in the politics of nostalgia." (Jenkins: 4)

The notion of childhood as a utopian space offered by Jenkins is not unique to present-day culture. In *Pictures of Innocence* (1998) art-historian Anne Higonnet

shows how Romantic images of children are defined by this cultural myth, that positions childhood as a separate space from adulthood. One of her examples is Joshua Reynolds's *Portrait of Penelope Boothby* (1788), which was commissioned by Penelope's parents because they were trying to "capture and preserve what they knew they were losing: the appearance of a three-year-old." According to Higgonet this English portrait elucidates how "every sunny, innocent cute Romantic child image stows away a dark side: a threat of loss, of change, and ultimately, of death."

(Higgonet: 29) Unlike predecessors in Dutch and French art, these images "do not tell any story about adult life. On the contrary, these children deny or enable us to forget, many aspects of adult society." (Higgonet: 23) This transition from the portrayal of the child-as-adult to childhood innocence in art history visualizes how the Romantic child is inherently modern. The image of the innocent, unaware child as a fixed, timeless image of eternal youth is the product of a culture that is very much aware of death and the ever-progressing time. Modernity is marked by a belief in unlimited progress and innovation. But progress eventually always ends with that ultimate unknowable: death.

The Romantic child can be understood as a reaction on the awareness of death and the irreversibility of time. The ideal that is not being lived *now* is projected into the past. This child is "a sign of a bygone era, of a past which is necessarily the past of adults, yet which, being so distinct, so sheltered, so innocent, is also inevitably a lost past, and therefore understood through the kind of memory we call nostalgia." (Higgonet: 27) This is why in *On Longing* (1984) Susan Stewart argues that childhood is the prevailing motif of nostalgia. A childhood not as lived, but as voluntary remembered. The Ideal child "implicitly denies the possibility of death - it attempts to present a realm of transcendence and immortality, a realm of the classic. This is the body-made-object, and thus the body as potential commodity, *taking place* within the abstract and infinite cycle of exchange." (Stewart: 133)

In *Child Loving* (1992) James Kincaid warns against this Ideal child as an object of adult desire. If childhood is understood as an object, as a blank slate, then adults can freely project their own fantasies onto children, whatever those might be. The innocent child suggests violation.

It is this danger inherent to the childhood nostalgia that haunts children's literature in criticism. Written by adults, stories about childhood might be used as a

tool in an effort to socialize, shape, or even indoctrinate children. They do not speak to the child, but to the adult's desire, states Jacqueline Rose in *The Case of Peter Pan* (1984). However, such critique on the ideological function of children's literature originates in the very belief that the child is other from adults. In *Artful Dodgers* (2009) Marah Gubar states that this critique underestimates children. It depicts them as "innocent naïfs whose literary skills are too primitive to enable them to cope with the aggressive textual overtures of the adult." (Gubar: 31) Gubar elaborates that such an approach of the child can elucidate why children's literature is critiqued for constructing childhood as a Golden Age, where in fact many writers demonstrate a skeptical representation of the Ideal child.

The discussion around the ideological function of children's literature demonstrates the inability of contemporary culture to free itself from the nostalgic discourse it contests. Contemporary culture is nostalgic. There is no way this literature can separate itself artificially from the culture it is a part of. Children's literature explicates a belief in the unique individual through narratives of becoming and growth as a focal point. Even though the cultural myth of childhood innocence is challenged by poststructural theories that question essential notions of selfhood, the most important question remains not whether the subject exists, but what kind of subject it is and how it comes into being.

At the same time it is evident that language itself can never provide for this Ideal child. This does not imply that the ideological function of children's literature does not exist, merely that the real child (reader) deserves more credit than to say that the adult can dominate and shape the child by prescribing it its rules through text. The reading child can by definition not be 'tabula rasa' on which adults can impose meanings. Text, for young as well as for old, is always ideological. Children are, just like adults, shaped by all kinds of forces.

The critique on children's literature as 'other' originates in nostalgic notions of childhood very much alive today. In a culture obsessed with remembering and forgetting, nostalgia is often shed away from as a (dangerous) sentiment outside of us, but this rejection disables critics from obtaining a clear picture of the workings and risks of nostalgia. Nostalgia is a personal sentiment, a response of the emotional, intellectually-engaged subject. In her cultural-historical *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) Svetlana Boym therefore stresses how "longing and critical thinking are not

opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment, or critical reflection.” (Boym: 49) In order to show why hostility towards nostalgia does not imply a more critical stance, Boym distinguishes between restorative and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia “does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition.” (Boym, 2007:13) It wants to return and rebuild the homeland with “paranoid determination”. Reflective nostalgia discovers through longing “that the past is not that which no longer exists, but [...] the past is something that “might act, and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality.” (Boym, 2001: 50)

Boym’s reflective nostalgia is ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary in character, and as such inherently postmodern. Postmodernity “recalls the past, but always with the kind of ironic double vision that acknowledges the final impossibility of indulging in nostalgia”, states Linda Hutcheon in “Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern” (Hutcheon [1998], 2000) “In the postmodern, nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited and ironized.” (Hutcheon: 205). Hutcheon sees in the relation between irony and nostalgia postmodernity’s complex relationship with modernity:

“If, as it has been argued often, nostalgia is a by-product of cultural *modernity* (with its alienation, its lamented loss of tradition and community), then *postmodernity*’s complex relationship with modernity – a relationship of both rupture and continuity – might help us understand the necessary addition of irony to this nostalgic inheritance.” (Hutcheon: 205)

The postmodern, reflective take on nostalgia is relevant for children’s literature, which is, through the construction of the child, in itself a product of modernity. The question is then, whether present-day children’s literature can also prove a demonstration of postmodernity’s complex relation with modernity, a relationship of both rupture and continuity. These narratives might embody any number of different visions, values and ideals that can illustrate the function and meanings of nostalgia. The subject matter of children’s literature is evidently nostalgic, showing the continuity of modernity. However, nostalgic sentiment is also a rhetorical practice, and if some rupture with modernity might be found, it is there where this nostalgia is invoked in order to exploit and ironize it.

In this thesis I want to explore this tension between rupture and continuity in children's literature by looking at the functions and meanings of nostalgia. I want to find out whether childhood nostalgia can be called up to challenge fixed, essentialist assumptions about reality, childhood and subjectivity. I therefore question the familiar critique of nostalgia and children's literature, which presents them both as dangerous, and as a way to escape the difficulties of life. Instead, I strive for a more reflective approach, which acknowledges (childhood) nostalgia as part of culture, but sees reflection as a necessary addition -especially in the criticism of children's literature.

Within children's literature, I have chosen to focus on contemporary coming-of-age stories, as this genre is depicted as influenced by the Romantic Bildungsroman. The Bildungsroman presents a belief in individual growth "as a direct line from error to truth, from confusion to clarity, from uncertainty to certainty." (Dilthey, by Trites: 11) Present-day coming-of-age stories often present a postmodern cynicism about the transformative power of maturity that defines the Bildungsroman. In *Disturbing the Universe* (2000) Roberta Seelinger Trites distinguishes these postmodern young adult novels from other adolescent novels, stressing that this genre is "less concerned with depicting growth reverently than it is with investigating how the individual exists within society [...] The postmodern awareness of the subject's inevitable construction as a product of language renders the construct of self-determination virtually obsolete." (Trites: 18)

The question posed in this thesis then is whether present-day coming-of-age literature takes a postmodern stance towards its Romantic lineage. Can the cultural construction of the child be challenged and exposed in children's literature? This means that I will look at the functions and meanings of nostalgia in the young adult novel. And, subsequently, attempt to find out whether or how this narrative deviates with postmodern awareness from fulfilling the Romantic plot of self-determination.

To find out how nostalgia manifests itself in present day coming-of-age novels, the becoming of the subject, and subjectivity itself, is approached as a dialogical construction. In postmodernism, subjectivity cannot be taken for granted, but neither can the becoming of the subject in children's literature be reduced to a determined outcome of social forces. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism overcomes the opposition between individual and society, between modern and postmodern conceptions of subjectivity. As Robyn McCallum argues in *Ideologies of Identity in*

Adolescent Fiction (1999), Bakhtin's dialogism has particular relevance to adolescent fiction where it "represents subjectivity as being dialogically constructed through interrelationships with others, through language, and/or in relation to social and cultural forces and ideologies." This concept then provides ways of approaching essentialist assumptions about subjectivity (the subject is taken for granted) and poststructural questioning of this subject not as an opposition, but as an interaction. This interaction is relevant where reflective nostalgia does not oppose restorative nostalgia and postmodernity displays both a rupture and continuity with modernity.

Subsequently this thesis will pay attention to the relationship between the theoretical ambitions of the field of children's literature, and the literary manifestation of nostalgia. For this reason I have chosen to analyse both a Dutch and an American adolescent novel. These are Floortje Zwigman's trilogy *Een groene bloem* (2005, 2007, 2010) and Meg Rosoff's *How Live Now* (2004). These novels are presented as part of the young adult genre, have been received as complex and sophisticated coming-of-age stories and were awarded with literary prizes. *Schijnbewegingen*, the first novel of Zwigman's trilogy, was awarded in Belgium with the 'Gouden Uil' and in The Netherlands with the 'Gouden Zoen', a Dutch literary prize for adolescent literature awarded by the CPNB. Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now* was awarded with the 'Guardian Children's Fiction Prize' in the UK, with the 'Printz Award' for young-adult literature in the USA and with the 'Branford Boase Award' for the best first time novelist.

For obvious reasons the examined corpus is too small for a trustworthy comparison between Dutch and Anglican adolescent novels and the theoretical ambition of 'their' field of children's literature. The comparison is thus made predominantly as an attempt to elucidate the importance of a theoretical approach of children's literature in the postmodern era.

The criterion for selecting my corpus is determined by narrative technique, time and the setting. Both present-day coming-of-age stories have a first person, focalizing narrator and are set in England, a country foreign to both writers. This makes the literary construction of England relevant in terms of the heritage industry (cultural nostalgia). The Dutch historical novel is situated in Victorian London where the American novel is set in the near future, in the English countryside. This means

both novels provoke questions about the function of nostalgia in the representation of real experience in literature in various ways.

In chapter 2 the relation between childhood and nostalgia is explored theoretically. This chapter starts with §1 *Nostalgia versus now* in which two examples of nostalgia in contemporary culture are looked upon closely to illuminate the difference between the experience of nostalgia as a personal sentiment and nostalgia as a public affair. This twofold notion of nostalgia asks for a closer look at the discourse of nostalgia, which immediately raises questions about the function of nostalgia in society and, as a result, in criticism. This function of nostalgia in theory and criticism will be more elaborately discussed in §2, whereby Boym's concept of restorative and reflective nostalgia in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) will prove useful in broadening the theoretical horizon. This creates the opportunity look at the narrative process of nostalgic reconstruction.

In chapter 3 a broader historical context is used to examine how the incorporation of nostalgia is caused by a modern view on (life)time and has effected in the construction of childhood as present in present-day culture. In §1 this historical overview will lead back to the concept of Rousseau's Nature-child in *Emile* (1762) in relation to the concept of Romantic childhood as a product of nostalgic desire as it can be found in Schiller's aesthetics in *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795).

Just as Romanticism proves the most important for children's literature in terms of the celebration of the individual and personal growth -emphasised through a special literary genre, the *Bildungsroman*- the connection between nostalgia and childhood and the differentiation between adult (culture) and child (nature) is also made during Romanticism. This relationship between childhood nostalgia and the developments within children's literature will be shed light on in §2. Thereby Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1902/1907) will be used as an example of the way nostalgia and children's literature get a special significance in the Victorian and Edwardian era in what nowadays is canonized as the Golden Age of children's literature. Hostile and reflective approaches of the narrative construction of childhood will be faced with each other in this paragraph in order to comprehend the workings of different nostalgic approaches in criticism.

With §3 a return to developments in present-day adolescent literature marks the concluding, final paragraph of this theoretical framework, which will be

completed with a contrast between the literary conception of growing up in modernity and in post-modernity.

In chapter 4 a literary analysis of Floortje Zwigman's *Een groene bloem* gives insight into the function and meanings of nostalgia in a historical coming-of-age story. Chapter 5 contains the literary analysis of Meg Rosoff's future-based *How I Live Now* and pays special attention to the significance of nostalgia in the construction of reality and a sense of belonging. Chapter 6 concludes with a comparative analysis of the findings in the analyses in relationship with importance of a theoretical approach of children's literature in postmodern society.

2. Theorizing Nostalgia

Reflecting on a structure of feeling

1. Nostalgia versus Now

Why is nostalgia still so effective and is it frequently subject to the arts, even though sentimentality seems to have become a no-go since at least twentieth-century-Modernism? To get a better understanding of how art can deal with nostalgia in today's society, this paragraph starts with two contemporary, artistic expressions of nostalgic longing in film and photography. I use these examples to show the ambiguous face of nostalgia and its relation to childhood.

The first example shows a grotesque image of nostalgic sentiments enjoyed consciously. The second example problematizes the first, by focusing on the practice of nostalgia in everyday life. Once the picture of the contemporary discourse of nostalgia is elucidated, it becomes possible to start thinking about the apparent opposition between the public and personal, outside and inside and the critical and the sentimental. This will lead to a reconsideration of the relation between nostalgia and power and nostalgia and criticism.

"I'd rather die than work." Anne Mette Beckmann is 56 years old, has debts with everyone she knows but still refuses to take on a job. Watching her struggle in *The Good Life* (2011), a Danish documentary about the once wealthy Anne Mette and her mother, is strangely entertaining. Incapable of letting go of the past they can by no means embrace what they have now become: *normal* people. And through turning a blind eye: poor people. It's just as hard to watch Anne Mette's sentimental whinging about the good childhood she had once, as it is to turn away from it. While present problems become more pressing every day, I realise: this will not end well.

"To dwell in the past... That way madness lies", Shakespeare's King Lear shrieks to get over his daughters' crimes in the homonymous play. The king's outburst in an attempt to find his sanity back might be a good way to describe our conflicting reaction to nostalgia in public discourse. I can see how Beckmann is ruining her life. She must be mad! - And that is why I like her. Because it is exactly her extreme case of sentimental dwelling on the past that intrigues me. Through this grotesque image, I

can acknowledge my own nostalgic feelings, while at the same time I do not have to sympathize with Beckmann, the pathetic, over-the-top victim of her nostalgic longings. I enjoy nostalgia's extravagances consciously, and play with the terror of it.

But if I enjoy nostalgia publically, and play down my own sentiments like this, where does that leave my personal nostalgic experience? Am I still able to take my sentiments seriously? Or am I suffering from anxiety and shame because of it, smoothing them over with some worst-case scenarios?

Most probably the latter. The overwhelming attention for photographer Marc Nixon's book *Much Loved* (published in October 2013) tells me I am ashamed of my own nostalgic tendencies, but that I am not alone. Not alone at all. For it can't have been anything but nostalgic desire that caused Nixon's book to sell out in Europe within two months. The book contains a collection of photographs of 'loved to bits' teddy bears. During the process of making the book, Nixon says he expected mainly submission from children, but soon got requests from adults. In his foreword the photographer notes how "[i]t was as though they had been keeping a long-held secret and could finally tell someone what their teddies really meant to them." (*Much Loved*, 2013) The surprise by Nixon that adults feel nostalgic about their stuffed toys is interesting in the first place because it was Nixon himself who decided to start the project. The reluctance he then detected by adult participators emphasises the underlying idea that personal feelings of nostalgia are something to be embarrassed about, but also something we would secretly like to share.

This secretive desire to tell about your teddy hints at the reason Nixon's book became a bestseller straight away. Through the book, we are confronted with something everybody is familiar with: the soft toy. The object of childhood. Psychologists call this a "transitional object". Invented to help us overcome the separation from our mother. But as *Much Loved* shows, many of us continue to love their "transitional objects" into adulthood. In newspaper *Trouw* Andrea Bosman scrutinizes the gravity with which worries over the soft toy of her child (*Trouw*, 24/5/2014) and comes to the conclusion that it is only in retrospect that we realize how important these "loyal friends" were. In line with this observation Nixon notices that it was his son's love for his soft toy that inspired *Much Loved*. Did that picture provoke memories of Nixon's own fluffy friends? His photographs certainly bring back memories of my cherished cuddly seal - and with that, bring me back to the

realm of my own childhood. It might be the very reason a book such as *Much Loved* is so successful. Once nostalgia and the child shake hands, there seems nothing left to worry about voluntary memories. It seems to be okay to feel nostalgic about childhood, even though this entails a sentimental approach of the past. *Much Loved* is drenched in childhood innocence. As a construction made out of material survivals, it displays a childhood as voluntarily remembered.

The first thing that stands out when rethinking a success-story like Nixon's photography-project, is the powerful negative connotation of nostalgia in public discourse that does not in any way match the saleability of *Much Loved*. In other words: nostalgic desire does not match the critique of nostalgia in present-day society. Nixon comes up with an excuse (his son) for his project and is surprised to find (other) adults interested. Of course it is exactly this surprise that hides the most powerful discursive nostalgic notion: adults should not seek refuge in a reconstructed past.

It becomes evident that *The Good Life* as a documentary does not satisfy an interest in rethinking the past, but underlines the familiar critique of nostalgia which presents it as a way to escape the difficulties in lived experience. *The Good Life* displays dominant meanings ascribed to nostalgia through shock rather than comfort. Only through its excesses it creates the opportunity to display personal nostalgic sentiments without challenging the critique on nostalgia in contemporary culture. This personal sentiment is exposed in *Much Loved*, which offers childhood nostalgia as the escape route from that hostile discourse.

2. Reflecting on nostalgic sentiments

The embarrassment, obsession and hostility surrounding the concept of nostalgia in the documentary The Good Life and the photography book Much Loved reveal an imbalance between the critique on nostalgia and nostalgia as personal, emotional response. Nostalgia is a sentiment. Sentiments can be discussed, but they cannot be denied. But nowadays that seems exactly what some critics have been trying to do (Tannock, 1995). It is in relation with politics that hostile notions of nostalgia can be found. Why reflecting is a much better option than denial is the subject of this paragraph.

2.1 Overcoming hostility towards nostalgia

In *On Living in an Old Country* (2009) historian Patrick Wright looks into the national past of Britain and argues how after two world wars there was not much left of an ideal. Nostalgia and its political child 'heritage' were invalidated and the belief in humanity crumbled. Wright quotes Hannah Arendt's *The Burden of Our Time*, later known as *The Origins Of Totalitarianism* (1951) to explain why nostalgia is critiqued as dangerous.

"We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead loaf which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain." (Arendt, 1951: ix)

Arendt's desire to reject nostalgia cannot be separated from the outrages of the twentieth century. The fascist regime resembles a classic example of the reactionary. In many ways, nostalgia is used for the "political purpose of directing behavior into approved roles and politics into approved ends of power." (Combs, 1993: 28) Nostalgic sentiments were and still are used in political propaganda. This negative, political conception of nostalgia still tends to be common in criticism with the persistent premise that nostalgia is pathological, regressive, and delusional. Or as one critic put it: "The victim of nostalgia is worse than a reactionary; he is an incurable sentimentalist" (Tannock (1995) quoting Lasch, 1984).

The demonizing effect of the link with a reactionary must be extremely powerful, exactly because of the sentiments behind it. It is without a doubt that nostalgia should always be critiqued for its limitations on effective historical interpretation and action. However, through a hostile notion of nostalgia, the sentiment is always linked to politics and power. Why this is unwise and unjust explains Svetlana Boym substantially in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (Boym, 2001), in which she considers nostalgia a universal human longing that enhances and

enriches reflection and extends the self. According to Boym, the hostile notion of nostalgia has not so much to do with sentimentality, but with the way it is put to *use* in politics:

"The first generation of romantics were not politicians; their nostalgic world view was *weltanschauung*, not *real politik*. When nostalgia turns political, romance is connected to nation building and native songs are purified. The official memory of the nation-state does not tolerate useless nostalgia, nostalgia for its own sake." (Boym: 14)

It is this conception of nostalgia as a Romantic 'structure of feeling', which can be used both to *reflect* (*anschau*) and *restore* (politics) that Boym uses to create a twofold notion of the concept: restorative and reflective nostalgia.

"Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* (home) and attempts a trans-historical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives on *algia* (the longing itself) and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately. These distinctions are not absolute binaries, and one can surely make a more refined mapping of the grey areas on the outskirts of imaginary homelands." (Boym: xviii)

Boym sees both types of nostalgia united in the "contemporary nostalgic", with its imperative of "to be homesick and to be sick of being at home—occasionally at the same time." (Boym: 50) Boym's restorative nostalgia relates to the problematic function of nostalgia as critiqued by Arendt. It is this nostalgia that loves heritage and is often used as a sentiment for political purposes - and therefore treated as such in criticism. The most important reason it is so dangerous, as Boym elucidates, is that restorative nostalgia "does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition." (Boym, 2007:13) It wants to return and rebuild the homeland with "paranoid determination."

While restorative nostalgia takes itself dead seriously, Boym stresses how reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, is ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary in

character. Boym's reflective nostalgic seems much more aware of the gap between identity and resemblance:

"The home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has just been renovated and gentrified beyond recognition. It is precisely this defamiliarization and sense of distance that drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present, and future. Through that longing, they discover that the past is not that which no longer exists, but, to quote Bergson, the past is something that "might act, and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality." (Boym: 50)

As Boym illustrates, it is through rhetorical practice that the critic, aware of his own sentiments, can find out how nostalgic images are inauthentic. It is precisely the awareness of the discrepancy between restorative and reflective coming together in the contemporary nostalgic that reveals how nostalgia can be a valuable way of approaching the past, because "longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment, or critical reflection." (Boym: 49) The twofold notion of Boym's nostalgia helps to understand how hostility towards nostalgia does not imply a more critical stance. It is the acknowledgment of the restorative side of nostalgia that disarms it and allows for critical reflection.

It is such a reflective approach of nostalgia in criticism, based on a general structure of feeling which responds to a personal need, *not* to political power that Stuart Tannock already strives for in his "Nostalgia Critique". (Tannock, 1995) According to Tannock, criticism is haunted by a predominantly hostile usage of nostalgia, which associates the phenomenon with the frequent use of nostalgia by dominant and conservative forces in society. He values nostalgia as a valid critical method of constructing and approaching the past - "recognised, that is, as a general structure of feeling, present in, and important to individuals and communities of all social groups." (Tannock: 461) According to Tannock a hostile notion of nostalgia is problematic where it makes the critic incapable of seeing how nostalgia functions in contemporary society: "Nostalgic narratives may embody any number of different visions, values, and ideals" where they confront us with "actual use and importance of

nostalgia in a period of discursive stasis and hesitation." (Tannock: 454) For this reason, Tannock argues for a distinguishing between the nostalgic sentiment as a subject matter, which can vary widely, and as a rhetorical practice:

"We need to separate out the critique of the content, author, and audience of a nostalgic narrative - who is nostalgic for what, and in the names of which community - from the critique of the structure of nostalgia itself - the positive evaluation of the past in response to a negatively evaluated present."

(Tannock: 456)

Both Boym and Tannock strive for a less hostile approach of nostalgia. They distinguish between structure and sentiment to depolitize the concept. In order to free nostalgia from its negative image Boym describes the contemporary nostalgic as a consolidation of both the object of desire (home) and the desire (longing) itself in her terminology of respectively the *restorative* and *reflective*. From a critical perspective, Tannock stresses the value of a nostalgic approach which separates the (literary-cultural) content of nostalgic messages from nostalgia as a general "structure of feeling".

2.2 *The narrative process of nostalgic reconstruction*

Nostalgia is reconstructing the past by saying: that was then and this is now. And the positing of discontinuity is as central to such a rhetorical practice as any assertion of continuity. This continuity could be understood from Gadamer's hermeneutics, when he states how "Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event." (Gadamer: 300) In *Truth and Method* (1975) Gadamer writes:

"History does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being*" (Gadamer, 277)

Gadamer explains how there is in fact little room for discontinuity because it is extremely hard to understand ourselves from any point of view other than history.

In *On Longing* (1984) Susan Stewart analyses this 'history' through which we understand ourselves as a narration of events, originated in human desire. In order to understand, we create the *idea* of continuity through narrative. Stewart connects nostalgia to the concepts of narrative and experience to explain this urgency to understand.

According to Stewart, narrative offers transcendence through organising experience - organising temporality and causality implicit in temporality. In other words: narrative helps us to understand time, as it organises time as a linear process of causal events, relating past, present and future. Hence, without narrative, the event cannot come to be. But Stewart stresses how

"[...] narrative also always lacks authenticity for its experience is *other*. The printed word suffers doubly from this lack, for not only has it lost the authenticity of lived experience - it has lost the authenticity of authorial voice as well. Who is speaking? It is the voice of abstraction, a voice which proclaims its absence with each word." (Stewart, 22)

What Stewart illuminates here, is that there is a contradictory set of assumptions at work simultaneously: transcendence through narrative enables us to get more insight, *and* 'lived experience' is more real and authentic and cannot be mediated. But where does it get nostalgic? Exactly in the meeting of these two assumptions. Or, as Stewart puts it:

"It is [...] in the conjunction of their *symptoms* that the social disease of nostalgia arises. By the narrative process of nostalgic reconstruction the present is denied and the past takes on an authenticity of being, an authenticity which, ironically, it can only achieve through narrative." (Stewart: 23)

Nostalgia thus reconstructs the *sense* of a 'lived experience' of the past through narrative. As a consequence, the narrative is made to look authentic and the *real* 'lived

experience', i.e. the present, is denied. Where Stewart illustrates how we normally make use of narratives to be able to understand time as a linear process of past, present and future, nostalgia uses this process *against* any fixed idea of time:

"The nostalgic is enamored of distance, not of the reference itself. Nostalgia cannot be sustained without loss. For the nostalgic to reach his or her goal of closing the gap between resemblance and identity, *lived* experience would have to take place, an erasure of the gap between sign and signified, an experience which would cancel out the desire that is nostalgia's reason for existence." (Stewart: 145)

Nostalgia does not want time to be a linear process, as it wants to revisit time like space. Stewart explains this nostalgic desire to revisit time like space with the example of the souvenir as the ultimate object of nostalgic desire for an unrepeatable event. An event thus, that exists only in narrative. The souvenir then serves as a trace of authentic experience of which the materiality has escaped us. It therefore does not only represent the lived experience of the maker, but also the secondhand experience of its possessor/owner. (Stewart: 135)

It is this use of the souvenir to retrieve something lost that elucidates the relation between nostalgia and the construction of childhood. According to Stewart, the souvenir is most often used to evoke the memory of childhood. Not of childhood as lived, but as voluntary remembered, as manufactured from its material survivals. Through the object of the souvenir, childhood can become a nostalgic "collage made of presents rather than a reawakening of a past." (Stewart: 145)

Childhood is nostalgia's prevailing motif because it stands for the erasure of the gap between nature and culture. Childhood nostalgia shows the desire to return to the utopia of biology, the maternal. For as Stewart argues, this utopia is "prelapsarian, a genesis where lived and mediated experiences are one, where authenticity and transcendence are both present and everywhere." (Stewart: 23) Nostalgia thus rebels against the modern notion of time itself, against the very idea of making history and against the idea of progress.

This nostalgic desire to return to a prelapsarian utopia is the subject of cultural ideological narratives. In "Reconstructing the Homeland" (1995) Tony Watkins

approaches these narratives as part of social and cultural discourses in contemporary culture. Watkins stresses that "nostalgia is experienced as a sense of historical decline and loss involving a departure from some golden age of 'homefulness' [...] a sense of the absence or loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty [...] the sense of loss of individual freedom and autonomy with the disappearance of genuine social relationships [...] and the idea of a loss of simplicity, personal authenticity and emotional spontaneity." (Watkins, 167)

2.3 *Nostalgia and Literature*

In the literary images used in nostalgic narratives, the difference between 'lived experience', i.e. the present, and narrative that is made to look authentic, becomes visible, as Peter Hunt shows in "Landscapes and Journeys, Metaphors and Maps: The Distinctive Feature of English Fantasy" (1987):

"That golden world of the Thames valley is being subtly recreated by authors who quietly edit out the less attractive aspects of modern England. Thus the pharmaceutical laboratories near Alderley do not appear in *The Weirstone*, and perhaps most spectacularly, virtually the whole of human "civilization" disappears in Richard Adams' *Watership Down*." (Hunt: 13)

This national-cultural level of nostalgia in narratives of a better past, deny the present situation, argues Hunt demonstrating his case with these literary images of England in fantastic children's literature.

Hunt's example of literary imagery of national-cultural nostalgia can be understood as a visualization of the organisation of time in the narrative. This representational functioning regarding time is explained by Bakhtin through his notion of the "chronotope", i.e. the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied." (Bakhtin, 250) Through the chronotope, time becomes visible. In *Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel* (Bakhtin, 1981) Bakhtin analyses the idyllic model for "restoring the ancient complex and for restoring folkloric time" in literature. (Bakhtin, 224) Although Bakhtin distinguishes many different types of idylls, all idylls remarkably have in common:

"that special relationship that time has to space: an organic fastening down, a grafting of life and its events to a place, to a familiar territory with all its nooks and crannies, its familiar mountains, valleys, fields, rivers and forests, and one's own home. Idyllic life and its events are inseparable from this concrete, spatial corner of the world where one's children and their children will live."(Bakhtin, 225)

This notion of the idyllic clarifies how space needs time to become idyllic. And interestingly enough, it does not seem to need much else: "Only a few of life's basic realities. Love, birth, death, marriage, labor, food and drink, stages of growth – these are the basic realities of idyllic life." (Bakhtin, 225-226)

Concluding, the narrative process of nostalgic reconstruction shows how nostalgia can only exist by the merits of the way we comprehend time. Modern understanding and nostalgia are matters of cause and effect. Provided that Gadamer illuminates how "understanding is a historically effected event", Stewart sheds light on how the narrative process on which this understanding is based, is used by the nostalgic in order to create the *idea* of lived experience as a felt lack. Where we use narrative to comprehend time as a linear process, nostalgia revisits time like space and denies the idea of past, present and future. Bakhtin puts emphasis on the importance of the nostalgic imagery in narrative of this revisiting of time like space in his notion of the chronotope.

3. Theorizing Childhood Nostalgia

Contemplating 'Otherness': Childhood Nostalgia & Children's Literature

This chapter focuses on the construction of the Ideal child and its persistent, much critiqued presence in children's literature. In order to comprehend the function of childhood nostalgia, it will prove imperative to take a closer look at the relation between nostalgia and Modernity within a broader historical context. So, paradoxically, this chapter contains the history of a concept which itself undermines the linear narration of time.

1.1 Homesick

Svetlana Boym notes in *The Future of Nostalgia* how "It would not occur to us to demand a prescription for nostalgia. Yet in the seventeenth century, nostalgia was considered a curable disease, akin to the common cold." (Boym, xiv) A translation of the Greek word clarifies how those suffering from nostalgia, felt homesick, with *nostos* meaning 'return home', and *algia* meaning 'longing'. Clearly, and other than our current longing for a different *time*, this longing evolved around a different *place*. Famous travel narratives such as Homer's *Odyssey* already show the painful longing associated with being away from home in their identifiable home-away-home structure. Medieval, Christian interpretations of these journeys can be traced in the innumerable quests for the Holy Grail. In their continuity, these tales demonstrate how homesickness was already known throughout European history.

Yet calling homesickness a physical disease is a whole other story. Hence it is only when homesickness becomes a problem due to the massive increase in travelling and dislocation of people in the quickly expanding world that it is coined 'nostalgia' by the Swiss Johannes Hofer in 1688. (Boym, *Hedgehog*: 7) Although purging, opium, leeches, and emulsions are often prescribed to solve the pain, the most famous cure prescribed by Swiss doctors is a trip to the homeland; to the Swiss Alps.

It is almost eighty years later when Rousseau writes about a ban on *Kuhreihen* in his *Dictionnaire de Musique* (1767). By then Swiss mercenaries are already notorious for their *Schweizerheimweh* (Swiss Illness). While fighting in the lowlands

to earn their livings, these hired soldiers supposedly missed their mountains to the point where their homesickness caused serious trouble. In his dictionary for music, Rousseau claims that for this reason, Swiss mercenaries were strictly forbidden to sing their *Kuhreihen*. The simple melodies, originally played on the horn by Alpine herdsmen, were believed to provoke such strong feelings of nostalgia that desertion or even death was to be expected.

1.2 The incorporation of nostalgia

It is during the aftermath of the French Revolution (1789-1799) that the German Idealist Immanuel Kant calls the notion of nostalgia as a curable physical disease into doubt. In his *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798) Kant writes about how "people who did return home were usually disappointed because, in fact, they did not want to return to a *place*, but to a *time*, a time of youth." (Hutcheon, 2000, quoting Kant: 194). With this remark, Kant takes up the concept of nostalgia as a disease, and pulls it straight into the realm of German Idealism and, with that, into modernity. His notion of nostalgia is Romantic in a way exemplary for the radical self-consciousness that marks modernity after the French Revolution. With the terror of the French Revolution, it becomes painfully clear that the belief in progress, power and creation is tied to a striving for freedom that tolerates no limits. It is through this realization of a limitless striving that the biggest disappointment arises as an insurmountable limitation: our own mortality. This awareness of death gives birth to our self-consciousness. It forms the beginning of the belief in autonomy and changes the ideas about the individual completely. In *Disturbing the Universe* (2000), an analysis of the power and repression in narratives for adolescents, Roberta Seelinger Trites describes how this radical self-consciousness, blended with the belief in progress, results in a Romantic belief in the liberating power of aesthetics in society:

"Romanticism was an early manifestation of society's effort in the era of modernity to self-legitimize that focuses on the individual's autonomy as liberating. Romanticism relies on a mythology that art is the means of legitimizing society. The artist's role is analogous to priesthood, and the cultural faith in transcendent individual growth represents an instance of self-legitimizing." (Trites: 17)

Unlike before, it becomes clear that the experience of homesickness with homecoming as its best cure does not prove a satisfactory explanation of what is going on. The longing stays. But it is incorporated, displaced, because death cannot be overcome. As one critic puts it beautifully: "Odysseus longs for home; Proust is in search of lost time." (Phillips: 65)

It is the impossibility to control time on which modern nostalgia depends. The ideals that cannot be lived up to in life are projected into a past, which is created for the very reason to do just that. Stewart's description of the ideal in *On Longing* provides insight in these workings of nostalgia:

"It is clear that in order for the body to exist as a standard of measurement, it must itself be exaggerated into an abstraction of an ideal. The *model* is not the realization of a variety of differences. As the word implies, it is an abstraction or image and not a presentation of any lived possibility." [...] In contrast to this model body, the body of lived experience is subject to change, transformation, and, most importantly, death. The idealized body implicitly denies the possibility of death - it attempts to present a realm of transcendence and immortality, a realm of the classic. This is the body-made-object, and thus the body as potential commodity, *taking place* within the abstract and infinite cycle of exchange." (Stewart: 133)

It is the very inaccessibility of the past which enables us to believe in the imagined past of our desire - to create the idealized body, an object, that "implicitly denies the possibility of death." For Kant, this denial of death can be found in 'the time of youth'. Kant writes matter-of-factly about the universality of a longing for this period in our lives. The characteristics of Romantic childhood clarify his interest in the subject. In his *Critique of Judgment* (1790) Kant envisions nature as the ultimate source of morality and aesthetics. The nostalgic notion of childhood, the Garden of Eden, does fit these ideas about aesthetic ideas, but Kant never wrote elaborately about the relation between aesthetics and childhood nostalgia. It is Schiller, proving himself a devout follower of Kant, who incorporates childhood longing in Kant's aesthetics, and in my opinion might have been Kant's source on the matter. In his essay *On*

Naïve and Sentimental Poetry (1795) Schiller takes as his object the distance from nature, namely culture, and the contradiction of reality (our imagination) when stating:

"All peoples, who have a history, have a paradise, a state of innocence, a golden age; yes, every individual man has his paradise, his golden age, which he remembers with more or less enthusiasm, according as he has more or less of the poetic in his nature." (Schiller: 228)

Schiller's essay must have struck a note with Kant, because both thinkers work with the same principles. Inspired by Kant's philosophy about how it is nature through which Genius rules the arts, and the powerful effect of the sublime on our morality, Schiller takes up this notion and ties it to the idea of the unspoiled, natural child.

"They *are* what we *were*; they are what we *ought to become* once more. We were nature as they, and our culture should lead us back to nature, upon the path of reason and freedom. They are therefore at the same time a representation of our lost childhood, which remains eternally most dear to us; hence, they fill us with a certain melancholy. At the same time, they are representations of our highest perfection in the ideal, hence, they transpose us into a sublime emotion." (Schiller: 180-181)

To Schiller, our lost childhood represents the ideal because it shows us what we, rational, cultivated adults once were and will be once more: nature. Schiller portrays the child as something we can no longer understand. The child, for Schiller, *is* nature. And it is clear that Schiller uses a Kantian approach to aesthetics when he states that the exposure to the representation of this Nature-child can transpose us into the sublime.

"Not because we look down upon the child from the height of our force and perfection, but rather because, from the *limitation* of our condition, which is inseparable from the *determination*, which we have once obtained, we *look up* to the boundless *determinability* in the child and to his pure innocence, we fall

into emotion, and our feeling in such a moment is too evidently mixed with a certain melancholy than that this source of the same were mistaken. In the child, the *predisposition and determination* is represented, in us the *fulfilment*, which always remains infinitely far behind the former. Hence, the child is to us a vivid representation of the ideal, not indeed of the fulfilled, but of the commissioned, and it is therefore by no means the conception of its poverty and limits, it is quite to the contrary the conception of its pure and free force, its integrity, its infinity, which moves us." (Schiller: 190)

For Schiller it is obvious that modernity with its radical self-consciousness needs the past, including nature, because both are timelessly available. Schiller draws a line between nature and culture and, following, between child and adult. Schiller's concept of the Ideal child has nothing to do with reality. It's a product of nostalgic desire. There is a big difference between jealously looking at the child and a healthy, progressive nostalgic longing as Schiller likes to point out.

"We see then in nature devoid of reason only a fortunate sister, who remained behind in the maternal home, out of which we stormed in the high spirits of our freedom into foreign parts. With painful desire we long to return thence, so soon as we've begun to experience the distress of culture and hear in the foreign country of art, the moving voice of the mother. So long as we were merely children of nature, we were happy and perfect; we have become free and have lost both. There from originates a twofold and very unequal longing for nature, a longing for its *happiness*, a longing for its *perfection*. The sensuous man laments only the loss of the first; the moral one can mourn only for the loss of the other." (Schiller: 192)

The difference between longing for happiness and longing for perfection as noted by Schiller, could be very well related to the difference between Romantic childhood longing and the child as pictured in Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education* (1762). The '*Emile*', often marked as first big theory about childhood and education, must have proved a huge inspiration to Kant and Schiller, both primarily interested in the (aesthetic and liberating) educational possibilities of Rousseau's notion of childhood.

1.3 Rousseau's Nature-child

"We know nothing of childhood", Rousseau already stated in 1762. (Rousseau: 5) And with that, childhood was conceptualised. How exceptional the publication of *Emile* must have been, becomes apparent in the social-historical study *Centuries of Childhood* by Philippe Ariès, who argues that prior to the Middle Ages, this period in our lives was thought of simply as a brief phase of dependency of little importance. According to Ariès it was not until the seventeenth century that adults started caring that much for their children. (Ariès, 8-11) In *Pictures of Innocence* (1998), a visual history of Ideal childhood, Anne Higonet notes how:

"before about the middle of the eighteenth century, the bodies of children were basically pictured the same way as adult bodies. [...] They were dressed like adults, behaved like adults and they did not look innocent -socially, psychically, or sexually. Human children appeared in paintings and sculpture in order to indicate their future adult status." (Higonet: 17)

This picture does not portray a child, but a person not much different from adults. Rousseau rejects such an approach of young people when he argues: "The wisest writers devote themselves to what a child is capable of learning. They are always looking for the man in the child, without considering what he is before he becomes a man." (Rousseau: 5) Rousseau is clearly concerned with the real child (or at least the real boy). But in order to stand up for that child and teach adults what the child needs, he fixes childhood as a separate state:

"Love childhood, indulge its sports, its pleasures, its delightful instincts. Who has not sometimes regretted that age when laughter was ever on the lips, and when the heart was ever at peace? Why rob these innocents of the joys which pass so quickly, of the precious gift which they cannot abuse? Why fill with bitterness the fleeting days of early childhood, days which will no more return for them than for you?" (Rousseau: 94)

Rousseau focuses on the child and uses real childhood experiences, happy memories as a way to show the importance of childhood and why the child should be treated differently from the adult. This differentiation between child and adult is based on the difference between nature and culture, but used by Rousseau in a political manner. His ideas about education are revolutionary and make the child an object of politics.

With Schiller, Rousseau's political child as an object of a certain historical time, is depoliticized. Schiller's use of Rousseau's Nature-child clarifies Kant's shift from *place* to *time* through his interpretation of nostalgia as a longing for limitlessness. As Higgonet stresses: "The image of the Romantic child replaces what we have lost, or what we fear to lose. Every sweetly sunny, innocently cute Romantic child image stows away a dark side: a threat of loss, of change, and ultimately, of death." (Higgonet: 29) This is in my opinion the big difference between Rousseau's Nature-child and Schiller's Ideal child. Although Rousseau already portrays the child as a clean slate, his concern lies in education and not with the function of nostalgic desire for this child. The image of the innocent child resounds through Rousseau's *Emile*, but Rousseau stands up for the real child in a certain historical setting. He describes the child as a noble savage and sees nature as the best parent and best teacher for the child. He sees no need for a human instructor as the child could go out into nature and be taught by imagination and experience. (Rousseau: 240) This means that all books, apart from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) should be kept away from the child. "First teach him things as they really are, afterwards you will teach him how they appear to us." (Rousseau: 333) Such a statement shows the child-orientated position of Rousseau's philosophical concept of the child. Contradictory, the Romantic child is invented for adults only. The child must stay unaware of the adult desire. A necessity for the adult, who longs for childhood exactly because of the child's innocence:

"Like vanishing points on our chronological horizon, the Romantic child shrinks away to an unattainable distance from the adult present. According to Romantic pictures of children, innocence must be an edenic state from which adults fall, never to return. Nor can Romantic children know adults; they are by definition unconscious of adult desires, including adult's desires for childhood." (Higgonet: 28)

As Humprey Carpenter writes in his canonical study of Victorian and Edwardian children's literature *Secret Gardens. The Golden Age of Children's Literature* (1985), the Romantic's view on childhood gets a voice in England with Blake's *Songs of Innocence* in 1789. "The *Songs* were [...] an ardent affirmation that children have access to a kind of visionary simplicity that is denied to adults." (Carpenter: 7) There is no question about whether these songs were ever written for children. They were to be enjoyed as literary pictures of innocence, so much in fashion by Romantics. That is: they were created for nostalgic 'pleasure'. Wordsworth (1770-1850) is perhaps most famous for this celebration of childhood nostalgia. It is worth looking at his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (completed in 1804)) a little more closely.

"There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it has been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more."

(Wordsworth: 347, lines 1–9 of 206)

The adult is fallen from his Edenic state and longing to return to it. The Ideal child is kept at an unattainable distance. There is no real child available in this poem, only a product of adult nostalgia, allowing for the creation of the most Ideal, Edenic, natural, Godlike, innocent, desirable picture of childhood. This is a poem for those who long Romantically: I long therefore I am.

1.4 The clever Ideal child: a paradox

During the peak of the Romantic Era (1800-1850 in most countries) childhood and the

Romantic child had been the subject of the intelligentsia. In other words: the subject of men. But as Higgonet argues:

“Already by the end of the eighteenth century pictures of children were considered sentimental and therefore faintly feminine. The most ambitious and accomplished artists, writers and audiences were all Romantic. But when Romanticism waned, childhood remained Romantic. The subject of childhood became intellectually marginal.” (Higgonet: 39)

The feminine side of childhood already speaks through Schiller's notion of the Romantic child when he states how “we see in *nature devoid of reason* only a fortunate sister, who remained behind in the maternal home, out of which we stormed in the high spirits of our freedom into foreign parts.” (Schiller: 192) Just like Rousseau's *Emile* is only intended for boys, Schiller sees only the boy go out and free himself. It is only the boy who from nature/object turns into culture/subject, and who's *rite de passage* can be followed in the *Bildungsroman*, distinct from other genres in that it “presupposes a more or less conscious attempt on the part of the hero to integrate his powers, to cultivate himself by his experience.” (Trites: 11-12) For the girl, this trajectory to subjectivity is not possible, as she, in Romantic ideology this is, is not ‘freed’ through culture. She remains an object.

The waning of Romanticism gives way to the Golden Age of children's literature (1860-1930). Although plenty of realistic children's stories are published during the Golden Age, it is with fantasy that the period 1860-1930 made fame. During this ‘Golden Age’ -almost exclusively- British writers create their classic masterpieces. Amongst them are Lewis Carroll (*Alice in Wonderland* 1865), Beatrix Potter, (*The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, 1902), J.M. Barrie (*Peter Pan*, 1902-1907), Kenneth Grahame (*The Wind in The Willows*, 1908) and A.A. Milne (*Winnie-the-pooh*, 1926). The choice of nineteenth-century Golden Age-writers to produce fantastic literature about childhood is often viewed as an attempt to escape the increasingly difficult conditions of contemporary life.

“Particularly during the Golden Age of children's literature, a host of critics agree, political, social, and religious crises led Victorian and Edwardian

authors to construct childhood itself as Golden Age, a refuge from the painful complexities of modern life. According to this line of thinking, when children's authors whisk child characters away to Wonderlands, secret gardens, or uninhabited islands, it attests to their "regressive desire for a preindustrial, rural world." as well as their longing to believe in the existence of a natural, autonomous self, free from the imprint of culture (Wullschläger 17)." (Gubar: 4)

In her critically acclaimed *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (2009) Marah Gubar contends that the ideology of innocence was much slower to spread than scholars generally assume. Gubar argues how this canonization of the Golden Age of children's literature as a period of escapism into golden childhoods invokes "an ideal of innocence inherited from the Romantics [that] underestimates the richness and complexity of Golden Age children's literature." (Gubar: vii) According to Gubar, children's literature from the Golden Age, such as Carroll's, Grahame's and Barrie's, offers in fact a sceptical representation of the Ideal child.

"Even when they detach child characters from home and school, classic Victorian and Edwardian children's books do not represent young people as untouched Others, magically free from adult influence. On the contrary, they generally conceive of child characters and child readers as socially saturated beings, profoundly shaped by culture." (Gubar: 4)

Golden Age children's books portray the child as shaped by culture. This seems in fact quite obvious. For Schiller's Nature-child exists only by merit of the 'Culture-adult'. The Ideal child is appealing to the adult because it is unspoiled by the artifices of civilization. If the Golden Age of children's literature is reconstructed as marked by the desire of writers to construct childhood *itself* as a Golden Age, the origin of the Ideal child as a product of adult nostalgia is ignored. The very notion of children's literature undermines the Ideal child and, as such, nostalgic desire. A reading child is by definition not an isolated Nature-child as it knows language and through language knows how to express itself in the world. This clever child naturally opposes the

blank, innocent, Ideal child. According to Gubar, all Victorian writers participate in 'the cult of the child' -as the sentimentality towards children and childhood in the nineteenth century is often referred to- but it is “children's literature [...] that offered the most serious and sustained *resistance* to this way of conceiving the child.”

(Gubar: 9)

In a review of *Artful Dodgers* in *Victorian Studies*, Margaret Higgonet has nothing but praise for Gubar, finishing with a description of its revealing cover: “Like the child in Borrell’s picture, entitled *Escaping Criticism* (1874), Victorian child protagonists ingeniously elude the narrow frames that critics have wanted to impose on them.” (Higgonet, M.: 144) But Gubar is not the first to note how writers of children's fiction were no obedient participators in the recreation of the Ideal child-imagery. In *Secret Gardens. The Golden Age of Children's Literature* (1985), Humphrey Carpenter, similarly to Gubar, describes Golden Age children's literature as both participating in *and* resisting the cult of the child. But unlike Gubar, Carpenter was not praised for his findings. In 1985, in that same *Victorian Studies*, Mary Burgan reviewed his book as “in some important ways limited and misleading”, and gets almost agitated about Carpenter's unsentimental analysis of *Peter Pan*:

“Carpenter admits that “the play itself is, on the deepest level, a satire and a mockery of belief” (p. 185). If we can credit such an interpretation, one might as well view all of English children's literature from 1860 to 1930 as building upon agonizing religious and social doubt.” (Burgan: 641)

What becomes evident in this critique is how it is not the children writer, not Carpenter, but the commentator who can't let go of the concept of childhood as a Golden Age. It is the commentator who refuses to see children as part of culture, because she is “characterizing them as ‘unconscious’ Others, incapable of enjoying topical references and linguistic play.” (Gubar: 24)

According to Carpenter the public *wants* to believe in the existence of Peter Pan. They see in him a new religious figure. With that, they ignore Barrie’s irony, as it is exactly the adoration of child-like imagination, linked to the Romantic child as a product of nostalgic desire that is ridiculed, states Carpenter:

“[*Peter Pan*] is a detailed map of the earthly paradise, the secret garden, more detailed than that made by any other writer. But at the same time it is a statement that such territory is only to be found in the imagination. Barrie invokes religious belief in his creation only to dismiss it as childish nonsense.” (Carpenter: 186)

When Carpenter explains Barrie’s adventures about Peter Pan this way, his analysis is called 'limited and misleading'. Six years after Burgan's review in *Victorian Studies*, Peter Hollindale would call Carpenter's essay on Peter Pan "the most original and stimulating of modern essays on the stories" in his introduction on a critical edition of Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *Peter and Wendy*. (Hollindale, 2008: xxiv)

According to Carpenter, the adventures of Peter Pan show how the Ideal child is by definition nonsensical as it opposes the rational. Its very *idea* requires an act of belief. No story shows this better. In fact, as Carpenter argues, this is what the fictitious character of Peter Pan is actually about: "childish imagination, splendid as it is, has the most terrible limitations, and can never (without growing up) come to terms with the real world." (Carpenter: 179)

2. *Peter Pan*: (Mocking) the Ideal child and the problem of child-addressee

Elaborating on the discussion in criticism about Barrie’s Peter Pan is relevant for this dissertation where it elucidates the main problems that haunt children’s literature: the dangers of the nostalgic notion that the child is ‘other’ from the (adult) author and, consequently, the problematic notion of children’s literature itself. By means of disentangling the discussion surrounding the character Peter Pan, this paragraph elaborates on the importance of self-reflexivity for both authors and critics of children’s literature and an approach of the real, reading child as empowered and (already) part of culture.

2.1 The irony of the unseen immortal: Carpenter’s reflective reading of Barrie

"All children, except one, grow up." (Barrie: 69) One could safely state that with Peter Pan, J.M. Barrie's created the perfect product of adult nostalgia. Peter Pan is the ultimate Romantic child. The immortal, timeless product of our imagination. We can

only see him if we believe in him. So, only children, who are thought to be much more imaginative than adults, can see Peter Pan, whose best known adventure is the stage play *Peter Pan or the boy who wouldn't grow up* (1904) which Barrie would later adapt as the novel *Peter and Wendy* (1911).

In Peter Pan's adventures, the immortal, timeless product of our imagination has to compete with another child: the Clever child in the story, who in the end does no longer see Peter Pan because it has grown up. These stories thus provides us with the competing conception of both the Clever child (Wendy), who reads, has house-rules, and has a gender, and the Romantic child (Peter). The children that populate Barrie's creations are founded in a variation of Romantic symbols of childhood, as Carpenter explains in *Secret Gardens*:

“Most of all he [Barrie] had taken up that familiar figure the Beautiful child and had turned it to brilliant use. In fact he had split it in two. One half he had made into a child-god, Peter Pan himself [...]. The other half, the mortal child (in the characters of Wendy and her brothers), is like Wordsworth's infant who comes into this world at birth with a memory of the heavenly life he used to lead. But Barrie's children do not come from Christian heaven, but from fairyland.” (Carpenter: 184)

The memory of a heavenly life of the Wordsworth's infant is put to perfect use through the creation of an imagined land, which can only be seen by the children who believe in it. But even the children who believe in Peter Pan are different from him, because they do have to grow up, as the very beginning of the story underlines. And when they do, the game of make-believe is over and they will not see him anymore. For Peter Pan's adventures “not only presents us with a secondary (make-believe) world, but reminds us that the 'primary' (real) world is there all the time, and must be returned to if maturity is to be achieved.” (Carpenter: 180)

The story of Peter Pan is about the power of imagination, which makes it very much 'true to life'. It narrates about children who are imagining; making up a heavenly life. There is no religion to it. These children are just playing make-believe, is how Carpenter explains the story: "Barrie's audience is meant to realise that the Never Never Land is entirely untrue. The 'secondary world' in *Peter Pan* does not

exist except in the children's imaginations. The play is constantly hinting at this." (Carpenter: 185) I would like to add: the narrative of Peter Pan deconstructs the Romantic child. To put it more bluntly: there *is* no Peter Pan. But at the same time, Peter Pan is also the protagonist of his adventures.

According to Carpenter, Barrie made ingenious use of an existing religious cult in order to create a platform for this imaginary protagonist. The Romantic image of the Nature-child is linked to Pan, the Greek god of nature. It is a brilliant find, because through his last name, Barrie places Peter Pan in an existing mythological framework and plays along with the cult around the god Pan that was at its peak around the turn of the nineteenth century.

“The Romantics had used Pan with genuine symbolic truth, but in their descendants he came to be a general convenience for representing almost anarchic impulses from the Id - the life force, sexual corruption, even the downright Satanic (as in Arthur Machen). At the other end of the spectrum comes the wistful, mystical sentimentality of Kenneth Grahame's ‘Piper at the Gates of Dawn’. It was at once a cloying and a muddy cult.” (Carpenter, quoting Whistler: 182)

According to Carpenter, Barrie rescued Pan from this cult that arose in the nineteenth century in England, as Peter Pan is "in many respects like the central figure of the Christian religion. At one moment he goes willingly towards death so as to save another, proclaiming: “To die will be an awfully big adventure.” (Carpenter: 182) But it is in fact Peter Pan's childhood-immortality, this ideal picture of adult nostalgic longing, which uncovers religion as nonsense. Carpenter focuses on this problematic notion when he states:

“For [Peter Pan] in consequence, there can be no maturity, no increase in wisdom, no procreation, not even death. There is only forgetting and starting out all over again. Peter is condemned to live out the same events every time a new generation of children follows him to Never-Never Land [...] There can be no ending, only a return to the beginning.” (Carpenter: 180)

This is, Peter Pan's adventures seem to imply, what happens if Romantic childhood imagery is idealized. According to Carpenter, the whole play should be understood as an attempt by Barrie to "show us the appalling depths to which our sentimentality towards children can lead us. One part of him is horribly sentimental; the other part is standing back and mocking it." (Carpenter: 186)

2.2 Hostility and the Voiceless Child: Questioning Rose's Critique

The "appalling depths to which our sentimentality towards children can lead us" are the focus of Jacqueline Rose's ideological critical *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984). Rose elaborates how it is the public who started worshipping Peter Pan religiously:

"The problem is not J.M. Barrie's - it is ours. Ours to the extent that we are undoubtedly implicated in the status which *Peter Pan* has acquired as the ultimate fetish of childhood. [...] it is we who have recognised *Peter Pan* (recognised in both senses of the term), and given it its status." (Rose: 4)

Rose does not see, like Carpenter, the possibility of a reading of Peter Pan's adventures as the mocking of the 'ultimate fetish of childhood' as she does not focus on Peter Pan's adventures (available first as a stage play, later as a novel), but on the *canonization* of his adventure, the obsession with the Romantic child, and with that, on the adult only. And this is why she states how "*Peter Pan* offers us the child - for ever. It gives us the child, but it does not speak *to* the child." (Rose: 1) Coming from feminism and semiotics, Rose elaborates that it is these characteristics of *Peter Pan* which illuminate a problem that lies at the heart of children's fiction:

"Children's fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), but where neither of them enter the space in between. To say that the child is inside the book - children's books are after all often as not *about* children - is to fall straight into the trap. It is to confuse the adult's intention to get at the child with the child it portrays." (Rose: 2)

In *The Case of Peter Pan*, Rose unmasks the fantasy that lies behind the concept of children's literature. Basing her case on *Peter Pan* (strictly speaking a work called *Peter Pan* was never written – it is unclear whether Rose refers with *Peter Pan* to the stage plays or the novel), Rose argues how the fictional child is a cultural production, a sexual and political mystification of the child that has nothing to do with real children:

“Suppose [...] that *Peter Pan* is a little boy who does not grow up, not because he does not want to, but because someone else prefers that he shouldn't. Suppose, therefore, that what is at stake in *Peter Pan* is the adult's desire for the child. I am not using 'desire' here in the sense of an act which is sought after or which must actually take place. [...] I am using desire to refer to a form of investment by the adult in the child, and to the demand made on the child as the effect of that investment, a demand which fixes the child and then holds it in place.” (Rose: 4)

Rose critiques the image of a boy who does not grow up, as this image of a timeless child results in expectations. It is, argues Rose, the adult's *desire* for the Romantic child, which makes the child believe it *is* a child. According to Rose, this mechanism is not unique to the domain of childhood, but is just one example of the fantasies of origins (others: Woman, Folk, Neurotic, etc.). It is “the belief that each one represents an ultimate beginning where everything is perfect or can at least be made good.” (Rose: 138)

Rose demonstrates how problematic it is to presume that children's books are simply ‘for’ children, as this assumption allows us to avoid acknowledging how adult needs and desires shape the genre. But one could argue whether all children's books define childhood according to Ideal childhood. The hostility towards the concept of the Ideal child keeps Rose from seeing that the complicated relationship between adult author and child reader often emerges as a key theme in children's literature (Gubar: 30), particularly in Golden Age literature as Gubar and Carpenter show. In fact, through narrow definitions of child and adult, her lack of reflection makes her pray to the very sentimentality she is haunting.

But of course Rose has a point. It would be very unwise to deny the ideological function of children's fiction. Children's literature is a tool "often employed by adults in an effort to socialize, shape, or even indoctrinate children." (Gubar: 31) But by implying, like Rose does, that the child reader succumbs to every adult effort to regulate and exploit them, means, as Gubar would frame it, to make children "innocent naïfs whose literary skills are too primitive to enable them to cope with the aggressive textual overtures of the adult." (Gubar: 31) However, neither should the case be made that classic children's texts are subversive. Gubar therefore advocates for a position which:

"[...] follow in the footsteps of the Golden Age authors who so carefully acknowledge the tremendous power that adults and their texts have over young people, while still allowing for the possibility that children - immersed from birth in a sea of discourse - can nevertheless navigate through this arena of competing currents in diverse and unexpected ways. Such a stance does not deny that children's literature (like all literature) is ideological or that actual children are culturally inscribed by adult discourse. Rather, it involves acknowledging what Nodelman has helpfully characterized as "the complex weaves that form individual subjectivities and the complex and often conflicting range of discourses and ideologies available to each of us as we go about living our lives." (Gubar: 33)

Recapitulating, the case of *Peter Pan* as analyzed in two essays published roughly at the same time (1984, Rose; 1985, Carpenter) sheds light on the effects of the approach of nostalgia in criticism. Carpenter's biographical analysis is personal, and gives room to reflect on the narrative. This enables him to demonstrate how a mocking of Ideal childhood does not imply a denial the ideological function of children's literature, but in fact helps to demonstrate how *Peter Pan*'s adventures can be read as an ironic approach of the adult desire to picture the child as ideal and timeless. The canonization of Barrie's writings shows that this reflection is denied by the *public* (of *Peter Pan*), who clearly desires the innocent child and is unable to reflect on it. Where at first the effusive sentimental writings were embraced, Rose's political approach of nostalgia shows how hostility towards a personal, universal

sentiment has a similar effect: the irony is missed out on. The importance of Rose's analysis lies there where it demonstrates how children's literature is always a product of nostalgic desire. However, it does not take into account the power of the hyperbolic use of this nostalgia. Next, Rose's hostile critique of nostalgia diminishes the power of the child. Rose's analysis shows how a hostile critique of the Ideal child as portrayed in Peter Pan's stories means that the child has to be stupefied: only the subjectivity of a naive, stupid child is endangered by reading overpowering texts from adults. In other words: Rose, as a critic of the Romantic childhood ideal, shows herself to be the biggest supporter of the opposition between nature and culture because she does not reflect on her own nostalgic sentiments.

As Gubar elaborates, Golden Age literature can be helpful to think about a way out of the dichotomy between power and repression as it acknowledges the power texts can have over children, while still allowing children to develop their subjectivity in unexpected ways. The self-reflexivity of Golden Age-writers -as shown in Carpenter's analysis- takes the child more seriously than a hostile notion of children's literature, which denies the child any agency.

3. Present-day subjectivity and awareness in the young adult novel

In postmodern society the self-reflexivity of children's literature towards the Ideal child expands through the awareness of the subject's construction as a product of language. Belief in the uniqueness of the individual crumbles. The Bildungsroman is questioned for its description of the linear development from nature to culture and belief in self-determination. The Romantic genre is transformed into the more reflective, ironical young adult novel in which achieving awareness of the relativity of authenticity in contemporary society becomes the main goal. In this paragraph the characteristics of the young adult novel are differentiated from the characteristics of the Bildungsroman to demonstrate the problematization of Romantic childhood in contemporary narratives about growing up.

3.1 Death and adolescent fiction

The nostalgic desire for the Romantic child can be related to the awareness of death and with that to the origins of self-consciousness itself. As Stewart has argued it is through the narrative of nostalgia that the "idealized body implicitly denies the

possibility of death - it attempts to present a realm of transcendence and immortality, a realm of the classic.” (Stewart: 133) With a child that cannot grow up, Barrie's *Peter Pan* exhibits the hyperbole of childhood nostalgia and consequently foregrounds the implications of immortality. In *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Culture* (2009) Kathryn James argues how death has only recently become a popular subject in children's literature: “The frequency of death's appearance in books published for children has increased markedly in the period post-1970, yet academic analyses of the subject remain limited. Perhaps the very act of bringing 'death' and 'children' together is unsettling.” (James: 2) Since the most important themes in children's literature are growth and development, with a special focus on personal identity, James argues how in this “literature of becoming [...] representations of death (the end of life) can have especial relevance.” (James: 2) Of course there is the instructional use of death: the dying can instruct the living about the true priorities and the worth of each individual's life. But where this descriptive use of death in narrative is mainly dedicated to coping of grief, James focuses on the social and cultural meanings of death and examines its function in ideological, discursive and rhetorical forms. As she has to conclude, this means that she has to focus on texts that seem to appeal mainly to teenagers, as in these texts, “representations of death are as varied as they are numerous.” (James: 3) According to Roberta Seelinger Trites it is this overwhelming presence of death in texts for teenagers that defines adolescent literature. In *Disturbing the Universe* (2000) she states how

“Mortality [...] has a different purpose in adolescent literature. In this genre, protagonists come to understand that death is more than a symbolic separation from the parent. Acknowledging death is more than a stage necessary toward growing up and away from one's parents. Death in adolescent literature is a threat, an experience adolescents understand as a finality.” (Trites: 118)

This experience of death as a threat by adolescent protagonists can according to Trites be comprehended from the linear structure of narratives about growth, as “death is often depicted in terms of maturation when the protagonist accepts the permanence of mortality, when s/he accepts herself as Being-towards-death.” (Trites: 118)

3.2 Postmodern maturation: questioning the power of transformation

The notion of death as the endpoint of a linear journey of individual growth is innate to the Bildungsroman, the genre that is often depicted as the most important influence of the contemporary adolescent novel. As a product of Romanticism, the Bildungsroman emerged in a time of romantic belief in the individual. Dilthey's formal definition of the genre illuminates this Romantic origin:

"First there is a cultural goal, which is the complete unfolding of all natural qualities; then there is a clear path toward that goal... in sum, the movement in the Bildungsroman is a reasonably direct line from error to truth, from confusion to clarity, from uncertainty to certainty, from, as the Germans have it, nature to spirit." (Dilthey as quoted by Trites: 11)

This definition of the Bildungsroman elucidates the function of the pillars under childhood nostalgia for the transition from the nature (child) to culture (adult). It clarifies how growing up is narrated as a transformation of the object (error) into subject (truth). Eternal youth as presented in the Bildungsroman comes to an end with the narrated inevitability of death. This idea of development from error to truth that forms the foundation of a linear narrative about individual growth cannot be sustained. Language does not allow for the image of the timeless child to be united with death, with Peter Pan as an infamous example.

In postmodernism, characterized by a loss of faith in the subject as the god of beings, self-development and becoming a subject become questionable topics. As Trites underlines: "Following World War II, maturity, adulthood, being harder to define, ceased to be privileged as the narrative goal in literature written for youth." (Trites: 19) Where in Romanticism as the beginning of modernity, the task of the individual was to grow into adulthood of autonomy and self-determination, Trites stresses how

"postmodernism [is] cynical about the transformative power of maturity [and] marks growth largely in terms of the individual's increased participation in capitalism. The narrative of growth in postmodernism becomes constituted as

an acceptance of one's cultural habitat rather than serving as a narrative about transcendence or separation. The postmodern awareness of the subject's inevitable construction as a product of language renders the construct of self-determination virtually obsolete." (Trites: 18)

The inability to exist outside of the language system makes the Romantic belief in autonomy a questionable affair. The more earthbound (less transcendent) conception of subjectivity and growth in postmodern narratives reveals how the Bildungsroman with its focus on self-determination is unrealistic. According to Trites, this explains the popularity of the young adult novel, which is "less concerned with depicting growth reverently than it is with investigating how the individual exists within society." (Trites: 19)

Although language at first glance seems to erase subjectivity, coming-of-age literature shows how theories that question the subject as a construct of language equalize the (fictive) child and adult. In the Bildungsroman, the subject ends up more powerful than he does in the young adult novel, because he is believed to be able to shape his authentic identity. Where the protagonist starts his journey as a powerless object (of nature), his cultivation results in his subjectivity and power. In the young adult novel, the subject is approached as part of culture from the very beginning. It is in fact the awareness of the powers that he has *and* the powers that he is subject to, that has to be achieved as the main goal in this narrative. As Trites defines this ideology of identity:

"Power is a force that operates within the subject and upon the subject in adolescent literature; teenagers are repressed as well as liberated by their own powers and by the powers of social forces that surround them in these books. Much of the genre is thus dedicated to depicting how potentially out-of-control adolescents can learn to exist within institutional structures." (Trites: 7)

Both modern and postmodern conceptions of growth as presented in the Bildungsroman and the young adult novel can be found in contemporary fiction for adolescents. Terminology can be quite confusing where it concerns the young adult

genre, as it is used not only to describe the postmodern narrative of awareness, but also by the consumers market, since it has become clear that a book labelled as a 'young adult' sells well. Quite often, books marketed as young adult novels fulfil the, in Trites words "obsolete" narration of maturation as self-development and are nothing 'more' than the traditional Bildungsroman. Sometimes they are more similar to the Entwicklungsroman: a genre in which the protagonist does not come of age, but makes an important step towards this maturation.

4. “This world is not my home”

Nostalgia’s many faces in
Floortje Zwigman’s Trilogy *Een groene bloem*

“Ergens in mijn lichaam, niet in mijn hersenen, maar in mijn armen, mijn benen, mijn longen, had ik de herinnering aan deze vrijheid bewaard. De snelheid. De beweging. De wind in je haren [...]
Laat het alsjeblieft nog even zo blijven, dacht ik. Laat ons alsjeblieft nog even blijven wie we zijn.” (*Schijnbewegingen*, 262)

“Somewhere in my body, not in my brain, but in my arms, my legs, my lungs, I'd kept the memory of this freedom. The speed. The movement. The wind blowing through your hair [...]
Please, I thought, let it stay like this for a little while. Please, just for a little while, let us stay who we are.”

Floortje Zwigman's trilogy *Een groene bloem* narrates the coming-of-age story of the poor, homosexual boy Adrian Mayfield. Written in the tradition of the Victorian novel, the style is realistic and idealistic. Zwigman is often referred to as 'a female Charles Dickens', showing a strong resemblance with the famous author through her social realism and idealized portrayal of difficult Victorian life, in which hard work, perseverance, love and luck pay off in the end. The Dutch writer chose Victorian London as the setting for her coming-of-age story, in which most of the events take place in 1895, when writer Oscar Wilde famously got convicted for sodomy. According to Karel Berkhout's review of *Een groene bloem* in Dutch newspaper NRC, it is rare for Dutch writers to situate a historical novel abroad. (NRC, March 25th: 2005) In a personal interview, Zwigman admitted that from a very early age on, she had always felt she somehow belonged in the Victorian era. With *Een groene bloem* she found a way to indulge in that bygone era.

As a first person, single strand narrative, *Een groene bloem* is focalised through the figure of a grown-up Adrian, narrating about the events that shaped his maturation. The life-changing moments mainly take place in 1894-1895, when Adrian, a then sixteen-year-old poor East-Londoner, loses his home and starts to define who he is. His path towards maturation is marked by his awakening homosexuality, bringing him in contact with underground male prostitution and famous historical figures with a prominent place for Oscar Wilde. Fictional characters, such as Adrian's lover, the painter Vincent Farley and painter Augustus Trops, introduce Adrian to this inner circle of the Victorian intelligentsia and provide viewpoints necessary for Adrian to accept who he is.

The focused text (Adrian's story) is shaped in the familiar home-away-home structure innate to many coming-of-age stories. Home stands for the familiar, for childhood and family values. The 'away' signifies the unknown, the unfamiliar cultural discourse, offering the protagonist the possibility to develop a personal identity through a dialogue between the new and the familiar. The possibility to return home demonstrates a conception of home as timeless and essential. The home is unchanging, showing why the 'away' is necessary for personal change and development.

Adrian is at home in rough, poor East London with its anti-homosexual discourse. As a child, he read penny dreadfuls. The 'away' is displayed by the decadents at Café Royal, that introduce Adrian to champagne, homosexual sex and literary conversation. These two opposites meet in the underground male prostitution, where Adrian makes a living. A hardship case turns intellectual. Differences between East-London discourse (against homosexuality, unskilled work, poverty) and the ideology of the intelligentsia (embracing homosexuality, intellect, wealth) provide for a representation of selfhood as being formed through dialogue with others and with the social, cultural world. Well-known literary texts, socio-historical narratives and moments and other intertextual discourses such as paintings and songs provide for the multivoiced *couleur locale* of the Victorian era and give depth to characters and the significance of the narrative.

Een groene bloem consists of the novels *Schijnbewegingen* (2005), *Tegenspel* (2007), and *Spiegeljongen* (2010). Apart from the trilogy, the novel *Kersenbloed* (2007), in 2011 republished as the prequel to *Een groene bloem*, is of significance to

the plot where it provides the multistranded narrative missing in the trilogy. In *Kersenbloed* a third-person omniscient narrator focalizes a traumatic event in the life of Vincent in 1880l, thereby giving Vincent a voice and providing an explanation for the functioning of this important figure in *Een groene bloem*.

Monologism and restorative nostalgia

Story-wise, the single-stranded *Een groene bloem* resemblances the social-realistic, traditional Victorian novel but also demonstrates a monologic, idealistic belief in self-determination, which predicts the happy ending: Adrian finds true love and acceptance and becomes the world-explorer he always desired to be. This ending is monologic in its assumption of a unitary structure and significance within the narrative, where it privileges the essentialist belief in subjectivity and, as a consequence, has to marginalize other notions of subjectivity in order to arrive at a single unified meaning. This does not mean that there are no other notions of subjectivity to be found in *Een groene bloem*. In fact, the displayed belief in the unified self that dominates the ending contradicts with the multivoiced narrative discourse that shapes Adrian's growing sense of self through his interrelationships with others. Before the monologic force of language steers the narrative towards a single unified meaning, interrelationships and intertextuality prove significant to the transition from childhood to adulthood in *Een groene bloem*.

Noteworthy is how this dialogical subjectivity contradicts monologism, which is associated with “a form of solipsism which fails to recognise or effaces the subjectivity of the other.” (McCallum: 15) In *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction* (1999) Robyn McCallum approaches subjectivity as:

“The individual's sense of a personal identity as a subject - in the sense of being a subject to some measure of external coercion -and as an agent - that is, being capable of conscious and deliberate thought and action. And this identity is formed in dialogue with the social discourses, practices and ideologies constituting the culture which an individual inhabits.” (McCallum: iii)

This dialogical concept of the becoming of the subject in narrative discourse problematizes a monologic reading of a coming of age-story because of the representation of polyphony and intersubjective relationships (i.e. the idea that subjectivity exists within interrelationships with others and with the world). The maturation of Adrian is described as a perceived need for him to overcome solipsism and develop an intersubjective concept of personal identity. The monologic ending shows a reversal of this process in addressivity. Conflicting forces within language and culture are marginalized in order to arrive at the single unified meaning.

Evidently, it is undesirable to pin down *Een groene bloem* as either monologic or dialogic (noted that all fiction is essentially always dialogic). It is both. When relating monologism and dialogism to nostalgia, it proves vital to take both in consideration. Just like monologism does not exist without dialogism, restorative and reflective nostalgia are two sides of the same coin. From the viewpoint of nostalgia, it is fruitful to relate monologism to the unreflective approach of history, subjectivity and narrative. Monologism/solipsism shows a strong resemblance with restorative nostalgia that reconstructs the past without taking in consideration the power of language and culture. It does not reflect on the impossibility to narrate lived experience and can therefore allow for a single unified meaning and essentialist ideas about subjectivity. This has implications for the narrative construction of both *fabula* and *sjet*. The *fabula* can show signs of restorative nostalgia through the chronological order of the events that arrives at a single unified meaning. The *sjet* can demonstrate the desire for nostalgic restoration, for instance through intertextual choices and a focalizing narrator that does not show any sign of awareness of the restorative function of nostalgia in an employment of narrative that does not expose nostalgia explicitly. As an effect, the nostalgic longing for a different time and for childhood, is implicitly used and represented as lived experience.

Dialogism and reflective nostalgia in critical thinking

Approaching a novel - any kind of novel- as monologic, that is, as a work with a single unified meaning, is similar to thinking restorative, with its desire to rebuild the past. Such an approach of narrative, explicates a desire to close the gap between sign and signified, desires narrative to be like real experience. As such, unified meaning can be related to solipsism of those who cannot (yet) distinguish between one's own

self and the otherness of the world. McCallum argues that the “preoccupation with personal maturation in adolescent fiction is commonly articulated in conjunction with a perceived need for children to overcome solipsism and develop intersubjective concepts of personal identity within this world and in relation to others.” (McCallum iv)

There is a similarity between the restorative and reflective nostalgia and the representation of subjectivity as a move out of solipsism through intersubjective relationships in order to create a personal identity. Reflective nostalgia as a process of growing awareness of the self through sentimental longing can only take place when that nostalgic desire is understood as a process between self and other (the world). As a response, so to speak.

Reflective nostalgia is an example of dialogism that can also be found in the transition that takes place when coming of age. As McCallum puts it: “Childhood and adolescence are typically seen as transitional stages leading (ideally) from a solipsistic childhood to an intersubjective adulthood, narrative representations of maturation are inscribed with ideological assumptions about the nature and possibilities of subjectivity.” (McCallum: 6) Growing up and becoming a subject can thus be understood as a process typified by the growing awareness of the self through dialogue with all that the self is not.

Tracing nostalgia

Literary manifestations of nostalgia can shed light on the suggested ideological assumptions about subjectivity, as nostalgia is in itself an ideology. In *Een groene bloem* the growth of the personal identity is tied to the gradual acceptance of homosexuality. As protagonist Adrian Mayfield's homosexuality is determinant for the plot development, special attention must be paid to sexuality.

Analysing *Een groene bloem* from the perspective of nostalgia can shed light on the ideological assumptions about Victorian London, childhood, selfhood, innocence and sexuality. The literary analysis questions in what way the ideology of childhood in this coming-of-age-narrative is put to use. Does the trilogy foreground the problematic conception of Romantic childhood innocence and (re)writing the past? Can *Een groene bloem* be read as a reflective nostalgic reconstruction of the

past that creates awareness about the fragmented nature of history and subjectivity?
Does this narrative question unified conceptions of time and being?

Summary

Adrian Mayfield is always in search for a place where he feels he can belong. As a homosexual growing up in Victorian London he craves love and acceptance and longs nostalgically for the (sexual) innocence of childhood. In *Schijnbewegingen* (2005, 508 pages), the first book of the trilogy, Adrian makes acquaintance with Augustus Trops, a painter who asks him to pose for him, makes love with Adrian and pays him for it. Trops introduces Adrian to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), which bears a strong intertextual resemblance to Adrian's life. It is also Trops who introduces Adrian to his rich friend, painter Vincent Farley, who Adrian falls desperately in love with while working as his model. When Vincent and Trops leave London for the holidays, Adrian has no means of making money as a model and quickly feels desperate and hungry enough to prostitute himself. Only after Vincent and Augustus return to London, Adrian finds out that Vincent loves him back, but their relationship must be kept secret by all means. And so, does Adrian realize, must the fact that he has worked as a prostitute.

In *Tegenspel* (2007, 494 pages) the relationship between Adrian and Vincent becomes hard to maintain when Oscar Wilde is put to trial for sodomy, Vincent's anxiety to be found out and Adrian's secret past as a prostitute put an end to the relationship. Adrian is driven back to his own family in East London, that is unaware of his homosexuality.

The last book, *Spiegeljongen* (2010, 607 pages) narrates about Adrian's lovesickness, which drives him close to insanity. He plans and finds help to try and ruin Vincent's reputation, but in the process almost destructs himself. In the end he finds true love with the young boy named Terry and becomes a journalist. The couple leaves London and starts exploring the world. Adrian makes his childhood-dreams to become an adventurer come true.

Nostalgia: an ideal escape

“We stommelden achter elkaar naar boven, net als vroeger thuis, als we uit school kwamen, blij met de vrije middag thuis, bang om over onze cijfers te vertellen. Mary Ann deed de deur naar de zitkamer open en ik bleef op de drempel staan.

Het was vreemd, bijna storend om onze oude meubels die ma meegenomen had en die niet bij de veiling van The Kings Arms verkocht waren in een vreemde kamer terug te zien. Het was thuis en tegelijkertijd niet thuis. De tafelklok tikte nog altijd even driftig maar stond op de verkeerde plaats. De sofa en de leunstoel waren veel te dicht tegen elkaar aangeschoven [...]” (*Schijnbewegingen*, 255).

“Close behind each other we stumbled up the stairs, like we were still young and living at home, coming back from school, happy to be off for the rest of the afternoon, afraid to explain our grades. Mary Ann opened the door and I stayed there, in the door opening.

It was strange, almost disturbing to see our old furniture, those things Mum took with her were not sold with The King's Arms, in a room I'd never been in before. The table clock made the same, hasty sound but stood in the wrong corner. The sofa and the chair were pushed too close together.”

Childhood memories come tumbling down when Adrian enters his mother's house for the first time. The implicit dialogue between the memory of the young Adrian coming home from school and the narrator focalisation shows a strong discrepancy between then and now, between the childhood memory and the actual events. The furniture looks out-of-place because what Adrian sees, does not fit the memory of his youth. So the clock is in the “wrong corner” and the sofa and the chair are pushed “too close together. The picture is transformed through time and events that have taken place. Adrian does not like it. When he goes roller-skating after the visit to his mother's house, it becomes clear that this response to the present situation is nostalgic:

“Ergens in mijn lichaam, niet in mijn hersenen, maar in mijn armen, mijn benen, mijn longen, had ik de herinnering aan deze vrijheid bewaard. De snelheid. De beweging. De wind in je haren [...]

Laat het alsjeblieft nog even zo blijven, dacht ik. Laat ons alsjeblieft nog even blijven wie we zijn.” (*Schijnbewegingen*, 262)

“Somewhere in my body, not in my brain, but in my arms, my legs, my lungs, I'd kept the memory of this freedom. The speed. The movement. The wind blowing through your hair [...]

Please, I thought, let it stay like this for a little while. Please, just for a little while, let us stay who we are.”

Through the play of roller-skating, Adrian enjoys an ultimate childhood experience which provokes strong feelings of nostalgia for a time wherein he felt he could be 'himself'. This idea of freedom related to such a typical child-play as roller-skating defines the ideology of childhood, which suggests that the child exists outside of institutional forces. Child-play functions as a material survival of childhood, and is used by Adrian to build a voluntary childhood.

How roller-skating provokes nostalgia and cannot be understood as 'just' a memory of the past, is clarified by the less ideal events that shaped Adrian's childhood. These events oppose the mythical home. Growing up in the East London theatre, with his father working as a variety star and his mother a tailor, his life takes a turn when the family wins the lottery and decides to buy the pub *The King's Arms*. Within no time his father becomes a drunk and his mother walks out on him with Adrian's sister Mary Ann. At fourteen, Adrian is responsible for the pub, which means he can't go to school. He tries to pay off the debts. But eighteen months later, he is declared bankrupt and ends up penniless on the streets. The reason he does not go and live with his mother, illuminates how there is, in the events that take place, no sign of the freedom Adrian remembers when thinking about his own childhood.

“Bij ma en Mary Ann zag ik mezelf niet aankloppen. Ik had geen zin in de verwijten over de goede toekomst die ik vergooid had. Ma's verwachtingen van haar kinderen waren zo hooggespannen dat we haar altijd teleurstelden.

Het honderd keer herhaald verwijt dat ik 'een kind van m'n vader was' had me wel afgeleerd haar om hulp te vragen.” (*Schijnbewegingen*: 51)

“I couldn't picture myself going to Mum's and Mary Ann's for help. I did not at all feel like being blamed for the fact that I had blown my chances at a good future. The expectations Mum had of her children were so high that we always disappointed her. The repeated reproach that I was 'my father's child' had made me drop the habit of asking her for help.”

These events oppose the freedom Adrian experiences during roller-skating. Even in the memory evoked when Adrian enters his mother's home for the first time, there is an implicit sign of the fact that children are already part of the same power structure as grown-ups: “Close behind each other we stumbled up the stairs, like we were still young and living at home, coming back from school, *happy to be off* for the rest of the afternoon, *afraid to explain our grades*.” (*italics*: WdR) This memory is not nostalgic, as it demonstrates how Adrian, as a child, already did feel part of a power system, which includes adults and institutions. He was "happy to be off" which implies that he did not enjoy school much and did not feel free, an interpretation supported by the anxiety demonstrated in the “afraid to explain our grades.” However, when Adrian sees the 'displaced' furniture, the memory becomes nostalgic, as the furniture seems to have become a timeless thing in Adrian's mind, which belongs to his mythical conception of home, and with that, to a more symbolic ideology of childhood. The displaced furniture suggests the loss of the mythical home, through the break up of his parents and the impossibility to return to a home that does not accept his homosexuality. Evidently, such a home never existed, and Adrian's nostalgia derives from an unsatisfying present, a desire to belong. He wants to escape the present through the realm of the imaginary.

But the ideology of childhood does not always function as an escape route; as a response to the unpleasant present. It also functions as a way to establish a better life. When his childhood-friend buys *The King's Arms*, Adrian returns to his old bedroom. But the room evokes feelings of guilt:

“Terwijl ik de dekens over me heen trok, voelde ik me vagelijk schuldig tegenover de Adrian van jaren geleden die hier bij het licht van de laaggedraaide gaslamp avonturenromans had gelezen, dromend van een toekomst waarin hij nog alles kon worden: van variétéster tot ontdekkingsreiziger. Ik had het gevoel dat ik hem verraden had.” (*Tegenspel*, 57)

“While I pulled the blankets over me, I felt somewhat guilty towards the Adrian from years ago, who'd read adventure novels by the low-turned flame of the gaslight, dreaming of a future in which he still could be anything: from variety star to world explorer. I had the feeling I'd betrayed him.”

Adrian feels as if he has betrayed his childhood-version, as it has turned out that he cannot be anything. These feelings of guilt are clearly bound to a romantic notion of self-determination. The guilt-trip in the bedroom elucidates that Adrian does still believe in self-determination, and feels miserable for not living this childhood-dream. The ideal is disturbed through sexual maturation.

In an anti-homosexual environment, the homosexual cannot make his dreams come true, as his sexual preference is not accepted. In other words: sexuality is denied for those who do not fit the heterosexual code. The homosexual cannot belong in a discourse that denies his existence. Sexual becoming cannot take place. Hence, Adrian's longing to be an innocent child could be comprehended as his desire to be unaware of his sexual preference, as the innocence of the child in a romantic ideology of childhood implies a neutral gender. Within such an ideology, the sexless child is not yet capable of differentiating himself in terms of gender and, therefore, can feel like he can become whoever he would like to be. The feelings of guilt and betrayal Adrian ventures, can be applied to his homosexuality, which he did not know about while reading his adventure novels. Adrian's longing to be innocent child in terms of his sexuality because it is his sexuality that has disturbed his belief in self-determination, can be comprehended from romantic ideology of childhood. At the same time, Adrian's notion that his homosexuality defines him, do not exist in a Victorian conception of identity. At the time, homosexuality would be considered a disease, perhaps, but it did not define your personal identity. This relation between

sexuality and defining a self is a more recent development, and demonstrated how Adrian, as a narrator, is a very present-time figure, who relates sexuality to identity. Traces of this post-Victorian sense of self can be found at the very beginning of *Schijnbewegingen*, when Adrian has not yet found out that he is gay. He shows signs of disgust and shock when painter Augustus Trops “that old faggot” tries to make him touch his crouch. The biggest horror seems to be that “that overheated piece of meat” thinks he is “queer”. (*Schijnbewegingen*: 22)

Een groene bloem suggests that Adrian has to deny his homosexuality in an anti-homosexual Victorian East London. His process of becoming is shaped by becoming aware that he is other than his surroundings. and the gradual acceptance of being other. The avant-garde intelligentsia of the time are used as a historical setting that allows for homosexuality, but can, through the historicity of the events never present the nowadays common notion of “being gay”. This makes him a very un-Victorian hero in a Victorian setting.

So, nostalgia functions as a way to make Adrian’s feelings of displacement clear. The home is already dysfunctional, but Adrian himself cannot fit his surroundings, because of his sexuality. In relation to the ideology of childhood everything that Adrian does not have is underlined. Next, the functions and meanings tied to the ideology of childhood to present his desires. His children’s books are tied to his future-dreams. But Adrian also uses childhood-souvenirs to feel better:

“Ik nam een paar slokjes chocolademelk. Warm. Zoet. Heel wat beter dan zwarte koffie of een rauw ei.” (*Schijnbewegingen*, 455)

“I took a few sips of my chocolatemilk. Warm. Sweet. A lot better than black coffee or a raw egg.”

“Ik voelde me warm worden, alsof ik net een grote mok chocolademelk leeggedronken had.” (*Tegenspel*: 30)

“I felt flushed and warm inside, like I just finished a big mug of hot chocolate.”

“Die avond trakteerde ik mezelf op warme melk en koekjes in bed en zat, met m'n deken om me heengeslagen, naar de brief op tafel te kijken alsof het een kostbaar verjaardagscadeau was.” (*Tegenspel*, 31)

“That night I treated myself with warm milk and biscuits in bed and looked, wrapped in my blanket, at the letter on the table like it was an expensive birthday present.”

The hot chocolate, warm milk, the biscuits, the blanket and the expensive birthday present are souvenirs of childhood and are used in these examples to evoke feelings of safety and happiness tied to the ideology of childhood. Adrian thus creates a voluntary memory of childhood to feel better. That this is indeed, and perhaps even more than a voluntary memory becomes clear where the chocolate milk does not stroke with the events in the story. The chocolate milk-memory cannot in any kind of way be related to the childhood Adrian actually had. It seems therefore that these experiences are not Adrian's. These souvenirs of childhood are so universal that they might as well belong to Zwigtman herself. This in fact seems quite likely, where the experience are recognisable to present-day readers, but do not match the dysfunctional home and family of Adrian. It thus might be the writer's own voluntary memory of childhood at work here.

Victorian Adrian can use these universally recognisable images in his favour because of the flaws that come with narration. Stewart demonstrates how nostalgia arises exactly there where lived experience does not take place, which makes nostalgia “a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience.” It is only in narrative that Adrian can represent an ideal childhood, as “the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack.” (Stewart: 23)

As becomes clear, nostalgic longing arises there where real experience shows a lack of something and can in narrative even be used when there is no trace of an ideal found in memory. For Adrian it is, next to a warm family home, his sexuality that denies him the idyllic life. His longing for childhood can then also be understood

as a longing for childhood innocence. This longing for the simplicity of (asexual) childhood becomes visible through a highly nostalgic narrator-focalisation and frequent representations of childhood as innocent, pure and simple. This is why in the childhood-game of roller-skating Adrian prays: “Please for a little while, let us stay who we are.” Homosexuality is then attached to the idea that it is impossible for Adrian to be who he wants to be, like the disrupted childhood dream illucidates. The narrative implies that with maturation, Adrian has lost something. This lost past can be used for nostalgic reasons, but in real experience, it is also just a past. Escape from present day life is not always necessary. And at such moments, Adrian can actually go home, because he then does not need to idealize this home:

“Ik was weer thuis.

Zwetend, botsend, met biervlekken op mijn nieuwe jasje en mijn armen om Rita's harde baleinentaille, had ik mezelf het verleden in gedanst, terug bij de Adrian die ik ooit geweest was.” (*Schijnbewegingen*: 207)

“I was home again.

Sweating, bumping, my new coat covered in beer stains and my arms wrapped around Rita's solid baleen-waist, I had danced myself back into the past, back to the Adrian I once was.”

This past is not ideal. Sweat and stains are part of Adrian's parentage. A parentage he can always find in East London. The Adrian he once was is at this moment not a free, innocent child, but an East London boy who was already part of society. The nostalgic memory is not at work here. The other Adrian is an Adrian who did not yet distinguish between his self and his surroundings. The old self is the solipsist self, that thought exactly like his surroundings. The new self has learned that there are other selves, other surroundings. Adrian can still enjoy the old life. What is new is that he does not identify with it anymore.

“I was home again” and “back to the Adrian I once was”, Adrian muses, relating place and time to a sense of self. Time becomes visible here, which makes this scene an example of Bakhtin's Chronotope. The chronotope, meaningful for the narrative for its organising functioning, are those places in the narrative where the

knots of the narrative are tied and untied. Considering nostalgia, the chronotope is interesting because it represents time and timelessness. Even the olden days are restored through the chronotope. The “I was home again” and “the Adrian I once was” demonstrate the realization of Adrian that he has changed, through a visit that makes him remember what he once was like. It does not touch on a longing to be that old Adrian again, like the roller skate-scene does. This quotation does not relate the idea of home to the edenic, timeless state, for East London *can* be revisited, where the home in relation to Romantic childhood can only exist in the realm of the imagination, a place that cannot be revisited, except through the memory that is called nostalgia.

The narrator makes time visible because it is only through the relation time/space that Adrian can still connect to his family, his home. Through the act of dancing, Adrian revisits time and can be the East-London Adrian again. East London is so important as it is, to speak with Gadamer, Adrian can only understand who he is in a self-evident way in family, society and the state in which he lives.

Similarly, Adrian shows how his world is shaken up through his involvement with the upper class, his awareness of other places and discourses than East London. But the narration needs approximately thousand pages before Adrian realizes that he could never root again at the place where he was raised. He has outgrown the family territory. The longing for the idyll has disappeared with Adrian's journey away from home.

“Deze wereld is niet mijn thuis...”

Een bedelaar die uit de goot was opgestaan, kon niet meer terug. Hij wist te goed dat er meer was.

Ik zou nooit vergeten dat er meer was: een zachter bed, een streling langs mijn wang die me wakker maakte, een verontschuldigende stem die fluisterde: "He he slaapkop, wordt het geen tijd om naar je eigen bed te gaan?", verwarring -wie was hij? - herinnering en opluchting dat het voorbij was, die tijd dat ik de naam van mijn bedgenoot niet kende omdat hij die voor zichzelf hield.

Ik wenste dat ik het nooit meegemaakt had, dat geluk. Wat je nooit gekend had, kon je ook niet missen, en godverdomme, wat deed dat missen pijn!" (*Tegenspel*: 473)

"This world is not my home....

A beggar that crawled out of the gutter couldn't go back. He knew too well there was more.

I'd never forget that there was more: a softer bed, a fondle of my cheek that awoke me, an apologising voice whispering: Hey, sleepyhead, don't you think it's time for bed?", confusion - who was he? - remembering and relief that it was all over, that time I didn't know the name of my bed partner because he kept it to himself.

I wished I'd never experienced it, that happiness. What you'd never known, you couldn't miss, and for fucks sake, that missing hurt."

After his relation with Vincent has ended, Adrian experiences the impossibility to occupy a subject position. His interference with the intelligentsia has alienated Adrian from his own cultural background. He can no longer live his East-London-life but at the same time he becomes aware of the fact that he does not belong to the intelligentsia. It is Adrian's growing awareness of his own identity through the polyphony of two different ideologies that makes it impossible for him to feel as if he has any possibilities.

Adrian had to change, as there is no possibility of self-development for a homosexual boy in East London. But although the intelligentsia accepts Adrian's homosexuality, his parentage makes it impossible to be completely accepted within the circle of Oscar Wilde. He always remains the East-London outcast to them. Adrian, then, does not belong anywhere. He really has to become an individual, independent from social restraint.

However, *Een groene bloem* pictures Victorian London as a place where heterosexuals are in power and homosexuals have to deny their sexuality. Adrian is reminded of his being 'other' when confronted with the basic rules of idyllic life he was brought up with, the rules of his community. This is visualized through the

narration of the most basic rule of the idyll: procreation. When childhood friend Gloria expects a baby, Adrian feels jealous.

“Ik was jaloers. Niet omdat ik zo nodig kinderen wilde - ik had daar zelfs nog nooit over nagedacht. Nee, het was iets wat erbij hoorde: trouwen, kinderen krijgen. Gloria werd vader. Dat zou ik nooit worden. Er was geen reden om mij te feliciteren, omdat mijn liefde nooit een trouwcertificaat zou opleveren.”
(*Tegenspel*: 182)

“I was jealous. Not because I wanted children that badly - I'd actually never thought about the matter. No, it was simply something you did: get married, have children. Gloria became a father. That would never happen to me. There was no reason to congratulate me, because my love would never get me a marriage certificate.”

The most basic things in life, Adrian realises, become impossible when you don't fit the heterosexual code. Love, birth, marriage... According to Bakhtin they are some of the main realities of idyllic life. (Bakhtin: 224) The familiar territory is close to sacred. In Adrian's narrative, the familiar territory would be his father's pub and the area (East London) where he grew up. It is through the absence of these basic things in life that Adrian becomes nostalgic for just that, as his longing cannot be fulfilled.

The ideological framework of the idyll presented in *Een groene bloem* and Adrian's impossibility to occupy a position within society and in relation to other selves, implies a growing awareness in Adrian that he is distinct from others. This transformation within Adrian, from someone who felt he belonged, into someone who does no longer feel as if he can be who he is, suggests a growing sense of self. The first novel *Spiegeljongen* offers an Adrian who has not yet accepted his homosexuality, and with that, little sense of self. This has completely changed in *Tegenspel*, the second novel of the trilogy. Adrian does no longer take a passive stance towards his situation within the dominant prestructured social order. He now has a relationship with a man. An awareness of Adrian that he does not fit in and that he will never be able to live the idyllic (heterosexual) life implies a move out of solipsism and towards a more personal identity. At the same time, it is the nostalgic

longing for this idyllic life that keeps pushing him forwards. He wants more out of life. He wants to make his childhood dreams come true.

Een groene bloem allows for this to happen. It does not accept the life Adrian seems condemned to live. In *Carpenters Towards Democracy* Adrian finds faith to believe in the idyllic life again, the life he desires to live:

“Vrijheid! De diepe ademtocht! Het woord dat al eeuwen en eeuwen wordt gehoord: de ziel die zachtjes en hartstochtelijk in zichzelf zingt: Vreugde! Vreugde!

Niet als in een droom. De aarde blijft en het dagelijks leven blijft, en het schrobben van stoepen, en het huis en het huishouden blijft; maar vreugde vult het, vult het huis tot de nok en zwelt tot de hemel en reikt tot de sterren: louter Vreugde!

[...]

Was dat niet wat ik me gewenst had? Een huis voor Terry en mij, gevuld met het geluk van alledaagse dingen.” (*Spiegeljongen*: 552-553)

“Freedom! The deep respiration! The world that has been heard for ages and ages: the soul, silently and passionately singing inside itself: Joy! Joy! Not like dreaming. The earth remains, daily life remains, and the scrubbing of the porch and the house and the household remains; but joy fills the house to the roof en reaches for the stars: pure Joy!

[...]

Had that not been my wish? A home for Terry and me, filled with the happiness of daily life?”

It is after reading this passage in *Towards Democracy* that Adrian declares his love to Terry, a gentle boy who works at the Zoo. The two leave London to live the idyllic life together. When Vincent meets Adrian years and years later, Terry and Adrian are still living happily together. Those who know something about Carpenter’s own life, might realize that it is not so much *Towards Democracy* but its author that provides for Adrian's luck. As a homosexual, Carpenter lived with his lover Merrill for most of

his life. That the two managed to escape scandal and arrest in a time that Oscar Wilde got convicted, is thought to be remarkable.

For the credibility of *Een groene bloem* as a historical novel, Carpenter's life story is of major importance. It verifies that there was at least one homosexual couple joined happily together. With that, it demonstrates at the same time the subjective, fragmented nature of all history. An extremely rare example of a homosexual couple, not living in the shadows, becomes commonplace in *Een groene bloem*, that allows a poor, homosexual whore to live this idyll. Adrian is given full agency to go against discourse and live the nostalgic, idyllic life he always dreamt of. This shows an opposition between Adrian's subjectivity and society. Against all odds Adrian can make a choice *not* to follow the dominant discourse by acting independent from social restraint. Adrian demonstrates a form of emancipation that is possible nowadays, but was an exception in the past. This emancipation can only be allowed in a nostalgic reconstruction of the past. Present-day values are written into the narrated history by picking intertextual references that fit the utopian picture. The nostalgic reconstruction of homosexual becoming in Victorian London suggests a utopian image of a present-day society that does no longer discriminate. Such a utopia seems only to exist in narrative.

Nostalgia in psychology of characters

Adrian's connection with the intelligentsia shapes his personal identity. This ideology of the intelligentsia dominates *Een groene bloem* through the use of intertextual references to the Decandents and comes about in the intellectual use of language by personage and narrator Adrian. (In)direct speech shows no signs of smooth talking -or it should be in the meagre presence of Adrian in direct speech. Even so, other characters often remark on Adrian's East-London-origin, which they detect in his accent and lack of literary knowledge. Vincent's niece asks Adrian: "[Tennyson] is the most famous poet of this age, but in East-London they do not read poetry, correct?" (*Schijnbewegingen*: 188). She makes it quite clear that East London is a no-go area for her: "I have never been to East-London. Daddy and Lilian would never permit it." (*Schijnbewegingen*: 219)

This is kind of confusing where Adrian's parentage is never foregrounded in language. There is no sign of an accent and Adrian acts very educated indeed. When he hears Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalot* he states:

“Maar ik vond het gedicht wel mooi. Het deed me denken aan de tekeningen van Holman Hunt.’

Zo. Daar had ik twee verbaasde blikken te pakken.

'En dat is in mijn ogen bijna even fraai als Millais' *Ophelia*' [...]'”

(*Schijnbewegingen*: 189)

“But I did like the poem. It reminded me of the drawings by Holman Hunt.’

There. They looked it me in surprise.

'And that, to me, makes it almost as fine as Millais' *Ophelia*.’”

Stylistically, Adrian's direct speech is rather more intelligent than simple and offers no sign of dialect. However, focalizing narrator demonstrates how Adrian is aware of the fact that others approach him as a simple, and that he likes to come about as an intellectual. But this intellectuality does not coincide with the Adrian as presented in the events. In fact, the narration represents an Implied Reader to whom Holman Hunt and Millais ring a bell. *Een groene bloem* provides an explicitly intellectual discourse through intertextuality and style.

An important intertextual referent is Oscar Wilde. Next to his presence as a character, plenty of references are made to his Urban Gothic novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1881). Wilde's presence as a historical figure gives *Een groene bloem* significance through the pro-homosexual ideology he stands for. Wilde is the historical hero of the story because of his explicit homosexuality. Adrian expresses a constant desire to belong to Wilde's inner circle because he feels as if there, he is accepted as a homosexual and can be part of something bigger. Sadly, he seems to be only desired for his innocence.

Intertextually, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is first mentioned to Adrian at page 22 of *Schijnbewegingen* and the story can be interpreted as a prediction of events. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a narrative about a man who trades his soul for eternal youth, about a painter and the painted model, is put in the hand of Adrian, who will shortly

after become that model and will trade his innocence and beauty for money. The consequences of Dorian Grey's striving for eternal youth can be applied to the story of Adrian, who towards his surroundings has to maintain an aura of childhood innocence in order to maintain the life he desires.

The appeal of Adrian's youth is related to the narrative about the impossibility of eternal youth and becomes significant for the plot when Adrian becomes a whore. He needs to represent himself as innocent in order to earn a living. The dangers of the trade are explicated in the intertext. After all, the story of Dorian Gray does not end well. It demonstrates how pursuit of eternal youth does not bring happiness and fulfilment. The popularity of gothic stories like Wilde's, and how some people actually believed them, is explicated in the dialogue between Adrian and his lover/painter Vincent. When Vincent is reading Wilde's book, Adrian half-jokes how he wished that Vincent would paint him such a portrait so he would never age.

“Dat lijkt me niet gek. Schilder ook maar eens zo'n portret van mij.' Ik wilde proberen of ik Vincent nog eens aan het lachen kon krijgen, net als vroeger. Het lukte niet.

‘Dat lijkt me geen goed idee', zei hij, zeer beslist en duidelijk [...]'”
(*Schijnbewegingen*: 455)

“That sounds wonderful. Paint me a portrait like that.' I wanted to try and make Vincent laugh, like the olden days.
It didn't work.

‘I don't think that's a good idea', he said loud and clear [...]'”

This dialogue suggests that Adrian desires eternal youth, and that he does not believe in ghost-stories. Vincent's reaction implies superstition and lack in courage. It is such anxiety that keeps Vincent from developing his own identity.

Victorians celebrated eternal youth and childhood innocence, while there is plenty of evidence that demonstrates how actual children already had to make their own living at a very young age – perhaps that is the very reason. Adrian serves as an example of child-workers. At the same time, it is the cult of the child that enables him to make money as a prostitute. As a prostitute, Adrian has to represent himself as

innocent, for innocent children, and especially innocent *boys*, were the *It Girls* of their era, as scholar in Women's Studies Martha Vicinus describes in 'The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme Fatale?' According to Vicinus, boys were celebrated for their innocence in the Victorian era:

“The boy personified a fleeting moment of liberty and of dangerously attractive innocence, making possible fantasies of total contingency and total annihilation. For men, the boy suggested freedom without committing them to action; for women, he represented their frustrated desire for action. But most of all, his presence in fin-de-siècle literature signified the coming of age of the modern gay and lesbian sensibility: his protean nature displayed a double desire? To love a boy and to be a boy.” (Vicinus: 1994, p. 91)

This remark on the presence of the boy in fin de siècle literature shows how not only the setting (in time and place) of the story, but also the form of *Een groene bloem* is historically determined. Adrian is the personification of this Victorian boy. A trilogy is a pre-eminently Victorian format, and the abundant use of language could also be described as illustrative for 19th-century literature. Evidently, the format of *Een groene bloem* demonstrates a nostalgic longing for Victorian literature, where this might not serve the significance of the plot. The present-day child-reader has to make sense of a narrative moulded in old-fashioned words and long sentences. At the same time, the presentation of a historical narrative in a Victorian way displays a restorative nostalgia, which tries to rebuild the past. The narrative itself allows a homosexual character to self-determine his life in a time where homosexual acts were forbidden and provides therefore an idealistic image of the Victorian era. Adrian can be characterized as a contemporary homosexual, who has much more freedom and possibilities to act as an agent, where the setting, the intertextual references and form are explicitly Victorian. Adrian has a contemporary mindset about homosexuality where his surroundings do not. Everything and everybody in *Een groene bloem* demonstrates the lack of freedom in this Victorian setting. The intelligentsia, a minor group exemplified in the presence of Oscar Wilde, face terrible consequences if they take the freedom to act on their desires. Adrian's agency is exceptional and illustrates the difference between then and now.

This use of a present-time discourse of homosexuality through focalisation of Adrian is not foregrounded in the text. Neither is the impossibility of narrating past time as real, experienced time. The authenticity-effect thus created, provides a picture of Victorian London in which homosexuality is banned through the presentation of historical events, where at the same time, focalisation allows for homosexuality through the ideology of the present-time discourse on sexuality. Due to the opposition between historical events and present-time focalisation, those who might have been hero's in Victorian London because of their avant-garde ideas about homosexuality, fail to be such in *Een groene bloem*, as the focalisation of events lies with a narrator with present-time possibilities. The fictive focalisator has an advantage over the historical figures. He becomes the hero of the story because he has a freedom of thought which is not allowed to the other figures as their story has already been concluded. Hence, avant-garde thinkers such as Oscar Wilde represent a lack of agency in *Een groene bloem* because the possibilities of self-determination for them is related to the Victorian discourse of homosexuality. Unlike Wilde, who got married to a woman and died after his imprisonment, Adrian, as a child dreaming to explore the world, makes all his dreams come true. In comparison to the happenings to the historical figure, Oscar Wilde, such a narrative of becoming seems unlikely. It is an inequality in chances created through the representation of fictive and historical events by a present-time focalisator that allows Adrian to become a hero, where historical hero's taste defeat through present-time eyes. As an effect, the opportunities of homosexuals in Victorian London are idealized, offering a nostalgic longing for Victorian London in its present-time representation of Victorian intertexts that serve as traces of authentic, unrepeatable experience. *Een groene bloem* thus can be read as a narrative that offers a nostalgic, present-day experience of events where it does not acknowledge the fact that the events can only exist in narrative reproduction, which gives them significance.

In "Sex & Sexuality in the 19th Century" Jan Marsh, researcher of late Victorian culture and the author of *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (1985) describes the late nineteenth century as a period wherein "heterosexuality was held to be both normal and natural" and only the later years "witnessed a visible increase in homosexuality, mainly in men and especially but not exclusively in the intelligentsia."

“While largely clandestine owing to laws prohibiting 'indecent' in public (the artist Simeon Solomon was one of those so prosecuted), private male homosexual acts were not explicitly and severely legislated against until 1885, when gay sex behind closed doors was made a criminal offence. This led, most notoriously, to the imprisonment in 1896 of Oscar Wilde, playwright and poseur.

Reasons for the emergence of a distinctly gay subculture within 1890's Decadence movement include the promotion of 'Greek' or Platonic relationships by some university dons; the extended bachelorhood that resulted from prescriptions of financial prudence and sexual continence; and a counter-cultural defiance of orthodox moral teaching, which gave added allure to the forbidden and deviant. The supremely Decadent drawings of Aubrey Beardsley (1872-98) vividly evoke the atmosphere of this moment.” (Jan Marsh: 2)

Where the historical setting of *Een groene bloem* seems based on a similar conception of the Victorian era, it provides readers with a worldview in which this 'counter-culture' becomes the dominant discourse. Such a representation of the Victorian era shows an ideological preference for the mindset of the minor group of intelligentsia, because its avant-garde ideas about homosexuality coincide with present-time discourse. This preference can be found in the implied reader and the use of language. For a narrator from East London, his sentences are surprisingly exalted. Thus the narrative demonstrates an ideological preference for the avant-garde and an idealistic view on agency. Those who do not disturb the Victorian universe are cowards in comparison to Adrian, who displays an (unlikely) overpowering amount of agency. It is the friction between narrated history and narrated fiction that allow for Adrian to become a hero to the disadvantage of Victorian-based figures. The disadvantage is best illustrated by the figure of Vincent, who comes about as weak and childlike because he 'chooses' not fight his discursive 'prison'. Next to Adrian's choice to live with a man, a choice that brings him happiness, Vincent's choice to get married to a woman is displayed as a personal failure. Vincent fails to determine his own life. His marriage turns out to be a disaster and he ends up unhappy and alone, realizing too late that he should have chosen a different life; a life against the dominant discourse.

Childhood innocence and paedophile writing

Oscar Wilde and his inner circle are portrayed as desirable company for Adrian, as these people are rich, famous, bright and homosexual. Adrian desires wealth, schooling and the acceptance of his homosexuality, those things he cannot find at home. It is, however, only his innocence and beauty that allow Adrian the possibility to be part of the circle, as this is all he has to offer. Adrian's position at Café Royal be understood through the myth of the prince and the pauper. In *Child-Loving. The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (1992), Kincaid relates this myth to paedophile writing:

“In paedophile writing we note the persistence of Prince and Pauper myths [...]. In this fable, the well-to-do (or at least better to do) adult loves and helps the poor child to rise. Often, as with Carpenter, this social perspective is made into an ideology series of democratic vistas opened up by way of paedophilia.”
(Kincaid: 203)

When painter Augustus Trops takes Adrian home, he immediately starts to interfere with Adrian's cultural upbringing and has sex with him. Adrian takes on the role of the poor child, helped by Trops, the rich adult who loves and helps him. Adrian needs Trops for money and education, where Trops needs Adrian to fulfil his sexual desires. This narrative is explicated in the dependency of Adrian - who has nowhere else to turn to in his longing for acceptance. This paedophile writing becomes significant in terms of nostalgia and personal identity when Adrian falls in love with Vincent, who is ten years older. Vincent loves Adrian, but does not accept his homosexuality as part of his being. Rather, he thinks of a relationship between men as the highest achievable, a relationship of the mind and soul. And so the relationship stays mostly platonic after Vincent loses his virginity to Adrian. Vincent thinks of himself as a protector of Adrian, he wants to take care of him. He is the prince, Adrian the pauper that needs help.

“Je hebt talenten, Adrian, en het zou zonde zijn die te vergooien omdat je toevallig aan de verkeerde kant van Londen bent geboren. [...] Je hebt in het British Museum al het een en ander geleerd, maar er is meer, zo veel meer in

de wereld: muziek, economie, politiek, rechtspraak, internationale betrekkingen. Ik zal je proberen wat bij te brengen, maar je zult altijd te weinig weten.” (*Tegenspel*: 154-155)

“You're talented, Adrian, and it would be a shame to let all that go to waste because you were accidentally born on the wrong side of London. [...] In the British Museum you've learned a little something but there's more, so much more: music, economy, politics, jurisdiction, international relations. I'll try and teach you, but it'll never be enough.”

Adrian needs to learn how to write properly, read the proper books and poems, attend the right concerts. The relationship is unequal, and no one can know about it. Vincent desires Adrian for his pretence of innocence. For all Vincent knows, Adrian represents the perfect (romantic) child of nature, not yet cultivated. Pure and sexless. Both of them fall in love for the first time, as Adrian narrates:

“Ik wist het. Ik hield van hem. Altijd al gedaan. Maar net als hij had ik nooit aan de liefde willen geloven. Nu was het echter tijd dat wel te doen. Tijd voor de mazelen.” (*Schijnbewegingen*: 495)

“I knew it. I loved him. I always did. But just like him I'd never wanted to believe in love. Now the time had come to do just that. Time for measles.”

Adrian the painters-model falls desperately in love with his employer. The reference to the measles demonstrates the presence of the focalising narrator, who is already aware of the fact that this love will not last forever. The love between Vincent and Adrian is referred to by the older (narrating) Adrian as an illness that has to be overcome as part of his *Bildung*.

When Vincent shows his affection, it comes as a surprise, for Vincent expressed nothing but contempt towards homosexuals before. The relationship with Adrian is strange and childlike. Secretive. Paedophilic. That the two will never be equals is clear from the beginning, when Adrian narrates:

“Hij was mijn redder, mijn adelaar, de sprookjesprins op het witte paard, de minnaar die ik niet aan durfde te kijken. [...] 'Ik wil je kussen, Mag ik je kussen?' vroeg ik hem.” (*Schijnbewegingen*: 495)

“He was my saviour, my eagle, de prince on the white horse, the lover I didn't dare to look straight in the eyes. [...] 'I want to kiss you. May I kiss you?' I asked him.”

During that first kiss, Adrian looks Vincent in the eye and finds nothing but blind, desperate panic. He feels something is not right and has to tell himself again and again that *this* is real, that *they* are real. Vincent urges him not to tell anyone about the love-affair. He does not acknowledge his homosexuality (*Schijnbewegingen*: 496, 459) and hides behind the poem *The Lady of Shalott* (1833) by Alfred Tennyson.

The poem *The Lady of Shalott* gives depth and insight in the character and motivations of Vincent. Loosely based on the Arthurian legend, it tells the story of Elaine, who suffers from a mysterious curse, of which the reason stays unclear. Isolated from the rest of the world, she lives her life in a tower, without ever being allowed to look directly out at the world. Instead, Elaine looks into a mirror, which reflects the busy life of Camelot. When she sees Lancelot in the mirror, its reflection is no longer enough. 'The shadows of the world' do not satisfy Elaine anymore and she looks directly out of the window. This brings out the curse. The mirror breaks and Elaine flees the tower to try and reach Camelot and Lancelot. She finds a boat but before she reaches the castle, she dies.

An intertextual match between Elaine and Vincent's story can be found on more than one level in *Een groene bloem*. From the beginning of *Schijnbewegingen*, a strong connection is made between Vincent and the Arthurian legend. Vincent lives at Camelot House, "a palace built from railway stocks" in Kensington, which “looked like a fairy tale and it was meant that way” (*Schijnbewegingen*: 109). Adrian the romanticist is desperate for a better life and loves Camelot House, even though it is fake:

“Maar ik wilde in dat sprookje gaan geloven, van 'Er was eens...' tot 'Ze leefden nog lang en gelukkig', in koning Arthur, in koninging Guinevere en in ridder Lancelot.” (*Schijnbewegingen*: 110)

“But I wanted to believe in that fairy tale, from 'Once upon a time...' 'till 'They lived happily ever after', in King Arthur, in Queen Guinevere and in Knight Lancelot.”

References to king Arthur and his court circle are numeral and it is Vincent himself who refers to *The Lady of Shalott* when he feels there is no other way to express his feelings.

“Ik las het [*De Lady van Shalott*] voor het eerst op kostschool. Ik denk dat ik de enige van mijn klas was die het mooi vond. [...] Ik kon begrijpen waarom de lady gelukkig was in haar hoge toren. Ze kon doen wat ze het allerliefste deed: mooie dingen maken. [...] Ik ben een hele tijd gelukkig geweest in mijn toren, Adrian... Ik zag alles door de spiegel van mijn kunst... op veilige afstand... maar wat... maar wat nu als kunst en schoonheid...”
(*Schijnbewegingen*: 459-460)

“I read it [*The Lady of Shalott*] for the first time at boarding school. I think I was the only one in class who liked it. [...] I understood why the lady felt happy in her high tower. She could do what she liked best: make beautiful things. [...] For a very long time I was happy in my tower, Adrian... I saw everything through the mirror of my art... From a safe distance... But what if... But what if art and beauty...”

Vincent recognises himself in the story of Elaine. His Lancelot is Adrian, who does not even realise that he brings a curse upon his lover. What this curse is exactly is illuminated by the Victorian painting of *The Lady of Shalott* by the pre-Raphaelite painter J.W. Waterhouse from 1888. In this picture, it is autumn and leaves drift on the water around the boat that brings Elaine away from the tower, towards Camelot. For Elaine it is not only the autumn of life - she drifts towards her death .

In the Victorian era the image of autumn also stood for the fall of a woman; those who surrendered to sexual temptation. Adrian is Vincent's sexual temptation. And with that, his curse. For in his ivory tower, with his art, Vincent is safe from his homosexual feelings. In the tower, he is the innocent child, sexless, seeing only the shadows of the world through the mirror. Adrian has broken that mirror. Although Vincent is not a woman, his longing for innocence is comprehensible from the perspective of his homosexuality and the fact that this was considered a disease and a crime back in the Victorian days. Vincent believes this as well, so 'the curse' feels real to him. He sees a doctor who tells him he can be cured from his homosexual feelings and begs Adrian to come along with him.

Even though he is truly in love with Adrian, Vincent is incapable of acting upon it. Holding-hands is about the only intimacy Adrian can get. Even though Vincent is much older than Adrian, sexually, he is the child. And more importantly, he wants Adrian to behave like a child as well. He wants the relationship to stay platonic, as he shows when the pair visits the museum to look at some marble Greek statues.

“Zou je ze niet mooier vinden als ze nog steeds beschilderd waren?” vroeg ik [Adrian] aan hem.

Hij keek omhoog, naar een marmeren jongeling op een voetstuk, die zijn armen lang zijn lichaam liet hangen alsof hij juist zijn mantel had laten vallen om zich door ons te laten bewonderen.

‘Nee, ik denk niet dat ik ze mooier zou vinden’, antwoordde Vincent na een lange bedachtzame pauze. ‘Het zou ze te echt maken.’” (*Tegenspel*: 93)

“Wouldn't you prefer them if they were still painted?” I [Adrian] asked him. He looked up, at a marble youngster on its pedestal, who's arms hang along his body as if he'd just dropped his cape to let us admire him.

‘No, I don't think I'd prefer that’, he answered after a long silence. ‘It would make them too real.’”

It is the smoothness of the statue that attracts Vincent. The blank; the unwritten. According to Vincent, painting a Greek statue, would mean contamination. A

contamination of something pure, something pristine. Vincent's obsession with Greek statues is explained in *Kersenbloed* (2007). The story narrates about a traumatic experience Vincent has in 1880, while still at boarding school. There he has his first sexual experience with a boy, but then another boy commits suicide. This boy is just like Vincent involved in a homosexual relationship and the impact of his death makes Vincent decide to turn his back on love altogether.

For Vincent, love becomes something shameful, a contamination of purity. In school, Vincent is taught that hunting down beauty always ends in misery and disappointment and that it is sometimes better to die than to sin. His professor uses the myth of the nymph Syrinx as an example. The lustful Greek faun Pan wants to 'deflower' Syrinx. He hunts down the nymph through the woods of Arcadia. Syrinx escapes, barely. Afraid to lose her virginity to Pan, she changes into reed stems. When the young Vincent hears this story, he is reminded of the marble statues he once saw at the British Museum. Smooth, blank, unwritten. And that is when he understands why the nymph runs away. (*Kersenbloed*: 39)

In *Een groene bloem* Vincent wants a statue to be innocent and pure, even though its posture suggests anything but. The lack of paint, of expression, gives him the opportunity to watch a naked body without shame, without truly recognizing what he sees. He makes a picture of innocence, posing his meaning on the old object that gets significance only through narrative. Vincent is capable to see the statue as innocent, capable of reproducing the narrative of the statue through a nostalgic longing because the statue is a souvenir. The meaning of the statue is no longer produced by the maker, but by the reproducer of this meaning through narrative. As such, the piece of art becomes part of contemporary discourse.

Vincent likes the statue in its busted condition, this is the way it is supposed to look. He creates the perfect souvenir serving merely the purpose of desire. The fact that the statue was once painted is simply denied. Because he desires the statues to represent innocence. Although the maker of the statue created it 'written', a second hand representation allows for the written statue to become unwritten. As Stewart illuminates, the distance in time gives Vincent the opportunity to think of the statues as perfect:

“The nostalgic is enamored of distance, not of the reference itself. Nostalgia cannot be sustained without loss. For the nostalgic to reach his or her goal of closing the gap between resemblance and identity, *lived* experience would have to take place, an erasure of the gap between sign and signified, an experience which would cancel out the desire that is nostalgia's reason for existence.” (Stewart: 145)

Through the gap between sign and signified, the statues display how Vincent uses nostalgia to sooth his anxieties, how he only focuses on this certain part of the past to make his life bearable: his childhood. Or better said: what he understands as childhood, a very romantic concept of childhood. The innocent child he craves and longs for. He does not realize how the concept of the innocent child is, just like the statues, a representation of nostalgic longing -only made possible because of the gap between sign and signified.

Although Vincent sees his love for Adrian as a curse, as he is unable to stay in his tower any longer, his love for Adrian itself is paedophilic in nature and shows in itself Vincent's desire to be a child again. As Kincaid explains, many paedophiles are not even after sex with a child.

“There is more to the child-lover's nostalgia than a reaction to lost love. The romance was, after all, not ended, but initiated by loss, by the attraction for a past one has lost long for the child came along. "You can't go back," says Dukahz, "but you can borrow an illusion so powerfully valid it at times overwhelms reality." Better, it becomes reality, this drive back into loss, this immersion in nostalgia for one's own child-being. Paedophilia is so deeply coloured by a desire to return, to be the child, that it does not take the loss of that loved child to induce nostalgia. The paedophile lives in and through nostalgia all the time; it is the romantic heart of the relationship.”(Kincaid: 228)

For Vincent, nostalgia definitely seems to be the heart of the relationship. Vincent is a twenty-eight-year-old virgin and it is seventeen-year-old Adrian who has to initiate anything sexual.

“Ik was hem te uitdagend. Een jongen die helemaal bloot was, van zijn kin tot zijn navel en nog verder omlaag, en daar nog om kon lachen ook, dat werd onze Vince teveel.

Wacht maar, dacht ik, ik ben nog niet klaar met je.” (*Tegenspel*: 146-147)

“I was too provocative to his liking. A boy in the nude, from chin to belly button and even further down, and could laugh about the matter as well - it was too much for our Vince.

You wait, I thought, I'm not done with you.”

Vincent's reaction to sex is pure shock. He is petrified and cries as if he has committed murder after the deed. One night, Adrian recognises Vincent as a sleeping Pan, a classic pose artists rarely portray, he thinks, because it would be too suggestive, too explicitly horny. What looks like sleep, Adrian takes for ecstasy. "Hij lag daar, zo naakt, zo dronken, zo helemaal van mij. Klaar om gekust te worden, geneukt..." (*Tegenspel*: 225) “*He lay there, completely drunk, completely naked, completely and utterly mine. Ready to be kissed, fucked...*” But after they've had sex again -and Vincent cries again - Vincent tells Adrian how disgusted he feels about what they have done. “Het is een zonde tegen de natuur, tegen God, tegen de zedelijkheid. En bovendien kan het niet anders dan ongezond zijn.” (233) (“It's a sin against nature, against God, against morality. And next to all this, this just has to be unhealthy.”)

The function of Pan

Vincent's desperate attempts to deny his homosexuality fit what is believed to be the Victorian discourse. All his anxieties are assembled in the symbolic representation of the God Pan, the mystical Greek God that caused so much uproar when the end of the Victorian era came nearer. As the Greek God of wild nature, Pan became a symbol of the power of nature and paganism. The mythological stories about Pan were juicy enough: His father Hermes would have taught him how to masturbate, a practise Pan happily passed on to the shepherds in his fields; i.e. he taught men how to masturbate. That Pan was indeed a horny God becomes clear when one sees statues of the half-

man-half-goat faun. There he is, his penis erect, trying to catch a Goddess, screwing a goat... Hence it is not surprising that it was during the period of Decadence that the intelligentsia could not get enough of The Great God Pan. He became the subject of many gothic horror-stories and the infamous Audrey Beardsley drew Pan frequently.

How it was in the Victorian era that Pan transformed from a thing of nature, an ancient, lusty shepherd, into the incarnation of evil should be comprehended from his shameless sexuality and the use of his image in paganism. Where the holiness of Jesus is for an important part dependent on the absence of sexuality, Pan is worshipped because he embraces sexuality. At the same time there is an increasing popularity of Pan as a Pagan God. The notion of Pan meaning 'all', starts to take hold. Christians feel threatened by these developments and start to demonize the Greek God. The image of the devil changes in that of something that looks a remarkable lot like Pan. Wings and clawed feet make place for the goat hoofs we still associate with Satan today.

For (Victorian) Christians, Pan is exactly what Vincent says homosexuality is: it is "a sin against nature, against God, against morality." Vincent considers sex an unholy act, and his fear is the fear of someone who believes in Gothic horror stories, someone who believes in the punishment of God.

Adrian only starts to understand the depth of Vincent's fear of Pan when he steals some of his drawings, afraid that Vincent will burn them all.

“Een jongenshand had een monster, half bok, half woest behaarde man, getekend dat zich over het bed van een slapend kind boog. De hand van een oudere en kundiger Vincent had een halfnaakte jongen getekend die aan de voet van een kersenboom lag, met bloed op zijn lippen. Een volwassen Vincent had met krijt een tekening gemaakt van een jongeman die zich liet nemen door een engel met brandende vleugels, in de felle kleuren van pijn.”
(*Spiegeljongen*: 116)

“A boy's hand had drawn a monster, half goat, half wild-bearded man, who stood bent over the bed of a sleeping child. The hand of an older and craftier Vincent had drawn a half-naked boy, who lay at the foot of a cherry tree, blood on his lips. A grown-up Vincent had used chalk to make a drawing of a

youngster who was taken from behind by an angel with burning wings, in fierce colours of pain.”

Adrian realises that he is the fallen angel that terrifies Vincent. In better days, Vincent would call Adrian *mon ange*. Adrian loses Vincent when the latter finds out that Adrian is not an innocent. He is not the child Vincent desires. The burning wings, the burning desire; Adrian, the fallen angel, the sin against morality. Adrian is the 'monster half-goat, half wild-bearded man' that Vincent drew as a child. Just before he sees the drawings, he attends a party where he plays dress up and chooses a Pan-costume:

“Ik raapte een houten masker van de grond op. Het was overtrokken met een ruwe dierenvacht en had twee prompte, scherpe hoorntjes. Een bokkenkop. Ik hield het masker voor mijn gezicht, maar kreeg toen een beter idee. [...] Nettles hielp me het masker voor te binden. De veter viel koud tussen mijn billen. De bok keek met zijn gele ogen loensend naar me op. Achter zijn sik hingen potsierlijk een pik en een stel ballen te bungelen. Ik maakte voor de spiegel een stel bokkensprongen [...]” (*Spiegeljongen*: 47-48)

“I picked up this wooden mask from the floor. It was covered in fur and had two prompt, sharp horns. A goat's head. I held the mask in front of my face but then got a better idea. [...] Nettles helped me tie the mask. The lace fell coldly between my ass. The goat looked up at me, squinting with this yellow eyes. Dangling grotesquely behind his goatee hang a set of cock and balls. I made a couple of capers in front of the mirror [...]”

This grotesque image reminds of Rabelais' carnivalesque, in which, behind the mask, one can feel free from the power of discourse and act accordingly. Dressed like Pan, he takes on the identity of Pan, and is sexually freed.

Een groene bloem: a refusal to surrender to the irreversibility of time

In *Een groene bloem*, nostalgia wears many faces. It functions as a cultural, romantic ideology of innocence, as a personal sentiment, but can also be traced in the narrative reproduction of history. The character of Adrian alone already brings about five functions and meanings of nostalgia. Firstly, Adrian demonstrates a desire for an ideal childhood, a childhood he never had and therefore can only exist in the realms of the imagination. The nostalgic nature of his memory of childhood is explicated through a gap between the realistic narration of his childhood and longing for childhood, which makes childhood look like an ideal place. Secondly, and partly related to the nostalgic memory of childhood, is Adrian's desire to be asexual again, because his sexuality distances him from his family. This longing for imaginary childhood safety illustrates Adrian's move out of solipsism. When Adrian starts to perceive himself as different from his family and dominant discourse, he starts longing nostalgically for the natural attachment that is innate to solipsism, as an inability to distinguish between self and other. The desire for asexuality can only arise when Adrian has yet started to think of himself as other, and is nostalgic because as a sexual being can never achieve the desire to be asexual, just like the asexual child cannot understand what it is like to have sexual feelings. The intertextual references to the cult of the Greek God Pan in the late 19th century allows for Adrian to embrace his sexuality in a present-day, free-spirited way. As a symbol of homosexuality, the references to Pan in the narrative discourse create an ideology that opposes the ideology of childhood innocence, as promoted in *The Lady of Shalott*. Through the focalization of Adrian, a preference for the cult of Pan is developed. As a result, the dominant anti-homosexual Victorian discourse, expressed with the ban on homosexual intercourse, is overpowered by the present-day, Western ideas about homosexuals. The narrative thus shows a desired Victorian London with the possibilities of Adrian to embrace his sexuality, using the cult of Pan as a souvenir as a way to go against the dominant Victorian discourse. Thirdly, nostalgia is represented as a longing for a life as represented in the adventure novel. The perfect life of the adventurer that can only exist through narrative, becomes an object of desire, making Adrian feel like a loser once he realizes that this idyll has nothing to do with reality. Fourthly, Adrian uses symbols of Romantic childhood, such as chocolate milk, biscuits and a blanket, to make himself feel less lonely. Nostalgic images of childhood innocence are at that moment put to use to

provoke the sensation of warmth and safety when reality does not provide for it. This nostalgic longing is implicit, showing the universal validity of childhood innocence as a topos. Lastly, the celebration of innocence and the longing for childhood is demonstrated as a Victorian affair, through the reference to child-prostitution and the desire for (young) boys. The younger Adrian looks, the more money he makes. This celebration of childhood innocence as a Victorian ideology also comes about in paedophilic relationship between Vincent and Adrian, narrated as a relation between the prince and the pauper. In the characterization of Vincent, nostalgic longing is explicitly related to the inability to grow up, thus demonstrating the dramatic consequences of a discourse that idealizes eternal youth, also illustrated with the intertextual reference to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Vincent wants to be an innocent child, as his homosexuality frightens him because of the dominant anti-homosexual discourse. The intertextual reference to Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* offers an image of the desired pure, uncontaminated life he wants to live. This imaginary, perfect image is in conflict with the cultivated world of adults. By making Vincent end up unhappy and alone, *Een groene bloem* explicitly shows the dangers of the celebration of childhood innocence, which is often related to the Victorian era. By foregrounding the impossibility to make imaginary childhood innocence part of lived experience. It thus puts emphasis on the fact that Romantic childhood can only exist in the realm of the imagination. How the imagined can be experienced as real, is exemplified with Vincent's love for the Greek statues. Vincent can think of the statues as representations of the pure and uncontaminated, where Adrian sees the sexual positions of the statues. Where there is no real experience of the maker, the statue can represent whatever the viewer wants them to represent. Vincent denies the present condition of the statue through a nostalgic desire for them to be unwritten. He can believe they are, because the significance of the statues can only exist in narrative, which is always ideological.

Een groene bloem as an artefact represents a nostalgic desire to revisit Victorian England. In the form of a trilogy, a 19th-century, English invention, the long sentences and, sometimes, complicated language, stylistic choices shows a desire to look like the 19th-century literature. The social-realistic plot of a poor boy finding love and happiness against all odds, justifies the comparison with Charles Dickens' idealistic tales. But where the latter narrates of a time in which the hardship of 19th-

century could still be felt through real experience, making the idealistic images of self-determination a literary escape from reality, the impossibility to revisit Victorian England through real experience problematizes the idealistic narration of self-determination in *Een groene bloem*. Distanced in time from the present-time, *Een groene bloem* becomes a souvenir of Victorian England that only exists in narrative. The discrepancy between the hardship in narrative discourse and the ending of self-determination thus can no longer be interpreted as escapist. Instead, it reads like a Victorian England that can only exist through the memory called nostalgia. It demonstrates the desire to “obliterate history and turn in into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plaques the human condition.” (Boym: xv) There is no sign of reflection on the workings of nostalgia through narrative, the nostalgia displayed could be describes as what Boym calls restorative, as it shows a desire to rebuild the past from a personal motif. Although a reflective nostalgia can be found in the polyphonic narrative discourse, which does not allow for a plot of self-determination, the restorative nostalgia comes to effect in the idealistic ending, which ignores the multivoiced narrative needed for the becoming of Adrian. Here, two ideologies of identity conflict each other. The first being an ideology of identity formed through dialogue between self and other. This ideology can be found in the significance of the highly intertextual narrative discourse, showing a dialogue between cultural ideologies and characters that shape the subject. The second ideology of identity can be traced in the plot-development with its idealistic ending of self-determination. The intersubjective relationships that develop Adrian's subjectivity in narrative discourse makes place for a representation of Adrian as independent. This ending therefore displays a notion of selfhood that is essentialist, presocial and prelinguistic where the intersubjectivity in narrative discourse displays a more present-time idea of selfhood through dialogue. As a plot of self-determination, *Een groene bloem* is an example of the genre of the Bildungsroman and intrinsically romantic. With the represented belief in self-determination, it rebels against the idea of time, of history and progress. Adrian's subjectivity is idealized so to make him the perfect model, a representation of nostalgic longing, as described by Stewart:

“The *model* is not the realization of a variety of differences. As the word implies, it is an abstraction or image and not a presentation of any lived possibility." [...] In contrast to this model body, the body of lived experience is subject to change, transformation, and, most importantly, death. The idealized body implicitly denies the possibility of death - it attempts to present a realm of transcendence and immortality, a realm of the classic. This is the body-made-object, and thus the body as potential commodity, *taking place* within the abstract and infinite cycle of exchange.” (Stewart: 133)

Where the narrative discourse offers an awareness of death as a driving power, in the search for food and shelter and the desire to make something out of the short period of life, the idealistic ending denies death as a possibility. With Adrian as a model, *Een groene bloem* valorizes the humanistic concept of agency, the subject capable of acting independently of social restraint. This is where Adrian becomes an object of nostalgic desire. The narrative displays an idealized Victorian London in which the poor, homosexual Adrian can become the hero for the fact that he is allowed agency that is denied to all other figures.

Finally, the representation of Victorian London in *Een groene bloem* can be identified as nostalgic through the use of form and language. The implied reader and the focalising narrator show a preference for the intelligentsia with an implied knowledge about art, philosophy and music in a predominantly avant-garde environment. The used language is complicated and does not foreground the East-London-background of Adrian that is only explicitly mentioned in dialogue. Adrian's concept of homosexuality is not Victorian, but present-time. This is possible because Victorian England cannot be revisited. It only exists in narrative, a narrative full of intertextual souvenirs, put to use to create the desired, nostalgic representation of a period without acknowledging through a foregrounding of narrative strategies that it does just that. The souvenir is described by Stewart as an object with the capacity to serve as a trace of authentic experience:

“The souvenir distinguishes experiences. We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that

thereby exist only through the invention of narrative. Through narrative the souvenir substitutes a context of perpetual consumption for its context of origin. It represents not only the lived experience of the maker but the secondhand experience of its possessor/owner.” (Stewart: 135)

The collage of intersubjectivities, amongst which the narrative of Wilde, does not reawaken the past, but displays a present-day, nostalgic take on the possibilities of homosexuals in the Victorian era. By taking the events surrounding Wilde's imprisonment, it represents lived experience without acknowledging its status of nostalgic narrative reproduction. Through narrative, the events, as souvenirs, affect the idea of authentic experience and can be used nostalgically. The valorization of humanistic ideas about essential selfhood of the individual is allowed through the older Adrian as focalizing narrator. This focalizing narrator demonstrates a freedom of thought and action that cannot be traced back in the narrative construction. As a narrative reconstruction of the past, *Een groene bloem* demonstrates both in representation of time and in the representation of the subject a refusal to surrender to the “irreversibility of time that plaques the human condition.” (Boym: xv)

5. “Some Perverse Kind of Nostalgia”

Disruptive Nostalgia in Meg Rosoff’s *How I Live Now*

“What remains of my life depends on what happened six years ago.
In my brain, in my limbs, in my dreams, it is still happening.” (182)

Can Daisy feel nostalgic when she never had a home to call her own? In the future-based coming-of-age novel *How I Live Now* (2004) by Meg Rosoff, fifteen-year-old New Yorker Daisy leaves a dysfunctional home to live with her cousins in England. The idyllic country-life she finds there is soon to be disturbed by a world war, pushing Daisy to undertake a journey that will change her outlook on life, her past and, consequently, her sense of selfhood. But what happens when childhood is not as happy and carefree as described by nostalgic ideologies of childhood? Will Daisy be able to develop a personal identity? This chapter explores the significance of nostalgia in the transition from childhood to maturity in a postmodern, futuristic coming-of-age story.

Among readings relating familial breakdown and the intersubjective relationships of its young adult characters, *How I Live Now* distinguishes itself with a manifestation of nostalgia that affects and challenges the becoming of the subject. The novel can be read as a postmodern reflection on the desired, timeless and unattainable representation of childhood, home, England and the future. How the negotiation between nostalgia and reflection, between past and present and between time and space shapes Daisy's coming-of-age, is explored by analyzing the function of restorative and reflective nostalgia in narrative. Attention will be paid to the function of nostalgia in narrative device, in the use of time and space and in the psychological construction of fictional character.

How I Live Now in literary criticism

Since its publication in 2004, *How I Live Now* has been subject to literary analysis and discussion of intersubjective relations and belonging in postmodern coming-of-age narrative. Amongst other readings, attention has been paid to the significance of

the mythological home, the idyllic portrayal of the countryside and trauma (anorexia, self harm).

In an analysis of place-based identities in *How I Live Now*, Karen Lockney has argued that the representation of belonging is tied to a highly unstable sense of home: "Although Daisy feels she is "home" at the end of the novel, there is no point at which any conception of this place is presented as entirely happy, safe or permanent." (Lockney, 2013: 315) Lockney puts emphasis on the role of the subject in the process of making space a place, which is meaningful when thinking about the concept of home in narrative. In her interpretation of *How I Live Now*, she calls the "shifting nature of the identity of place, and the identity of individual characters in relation to place" a "striking feature" of *How I Live Now*, naming the foremost concerns of this novel "that of belonging, and the associated identities which stem from a relationship with place." (Lockney: 312) Lockney describes the relation between places and identities as "ways in which one's personal identity might be bound up with a place, or places (which in turn can contribute to the identity of a place)" and argues for a "more progressive, less static conception of place which, crucially, takes into account the social relations inherent in humans' interaction with place." (Lockney, 2013: 314) With this, she draws on Wilson and Short's paper on the changing paradigm of place - which in children's literature traditionally focuses on the idea of home as a place where "the child protagonist is cared for, loved, and disciplined while waiting to become an adult." (Wilson and Short, 2012: p. 130) According to Wilson and Short, contemporary children's literature often challenges the mythology of home in "postmodern metaplots". (2012: 129) Using Doreen Massey's perception of "identities of place [as] unfixed, contested or multiple" (Massey, 1994: p. 5), Lockney argues that Rosoff's *How I Live Now* "challenges traditional conceptions of place as being a fixed or stable concept" because it offers "a progressive notion of place-based identity, given that the notion of 'home' is so prevalent in children's literature, traditionally drawing on a static notion of 'home'." (Lockney: 314) Lockney thus argues how the nostalgic representation of the idyll in *How I Live Now* does not provide for ultimate belonging, but in fact questions the belief of safety and stability in life.

Christine Wilkie-Stibbs has suggested that the manifestation of natural-cultural nostalgia in *How I Live Now* can be related to Daisy's desire for a sense of

belonging. Looking for questions concerning the potential impact of new global orders on the life of young people, the associate professor in children's literature argues that "in Rosoff, what overtakes the young adults is the imminent collapse of the fragile capitalist system into worldwide terrorism and the destruction of the very possibility of home and refuge in a world where actual lived space replicates the fluidity of homogenized spaces of globalization." (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2006: 255) Wilkie-Stibbs argues that Daisy searches for homefulness that is no longer available: "The home and family that were traditionally supposed to be spaces of refuge have become spaces of endangerment and exile, and the house to which she has been exiled turns out subsequently to be a space of sanctuary that she comes to regard as her home." This is according to Wilkie-Stibbs represented in the ironical inversion of the "idea of "homeland" and "another country" [...] (Said 25), the former being a space of disconnection and alienation and the latter becoming operational as a liminal space in which Daisy negotiates between her past and her present and through which she reconnects with her bodily and emotional self." (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2006: 252)

Sarah Ellis has looked at the significance of the metaphorical use of anorexia in *How I Live Now*, a disease that "informs this story on a kind of cellular level." (Ellis, 2008: 160) "It is all about the body, which pretty much sums up the concerns of the teen years, wherever you are." (Ellis: 161-162) Ellis notes how "Rosoff's use of anorexia enriches this novel on every level. "First of all it is a sturdy plot device" and "from a story structure point of view, anorexia is a clear indicator of character change in the novel." (Ellis: 160) Next, Ellis puts emphasis on the anorexia in three overarching metaphors. The tension between scarcity and plenty, played out in war shows "the painful and frustrating paradox of anorexia: Children starving in the midst of plenty. "[...] The two ideas of inside and outside: "Daisy arrives in England with a pretty much impermeable membrane, a membrane of anger, scorn, boredom, and cleverness. The anorexia turns this from metaphor to concrete physical reality. Daisy will not let anything in. Or, by extension, out." (Ellis: 161) Ellis relates this to the "act of growing and it is the hardest, most painful, most passionate task that we have, at any age." The final metaphor is the link between hunger and desire. "What keeps the sex between Daisy and Edmund from becoming melodrama is that it is the force that begins a process whereby Daisy becomes strong enough to let things in and out, whereby she begins to inhabit herself and grow." (Ellis: 162)

An analysis of the function of nostalgia in *How I Live Now* is of value to the literary field where it can provide insight in the ideas about what belonging can imply in a present-day coming-of-age story. Literary manifestations of the home, what it means to leave home and whether there is a possibility to return to it, give insight in the process of growing up and what this implies. Through nostalgia, the significance of the home-away-home structure can be explored profoundly. As Lockney has demonstrated, belonging manifests itself in the need for a personal identity to transform space into place. Lockney describes the home as something progressive, changing, allowing the personal identity power over the place. By looking at belonging from the viewpoint of nostalgia, the desire to make space into a place is under discussion. Nostalgia can give insight in the function of the myth of the stable (family) home, frequently used in children's literature, and how this discourse affects the desire to belong.

Plot

How I Live Now is a realistic narrative, set in a recognisable, near-future world. The setting is predominantly an idyllic English countryside in summertime, and displays a cultural nostalgic take on English. The literary manifestation of England is a product of the heritage industry, with its idyllic landscape (woods, footpaths, rivers, small farms, animals) and better manners (English tea, Victorian houses, Queens English).

This nostalgic image of England as the good old country is enhanced in a contrast with the representation of New York as a concrete jungle dominated by television and violence. The narrative perspective is established by a first person, focalising narrator, bringing the focus on the feelings, opinions, and perceptions of Daisy and how she views the world and the views of others. The story is written as a memoir of traumatic, life-changing events in the scope of six years, starting in the narrated past and ending in the narrated present. Looking back from the represented present, Daisy processes her past and shows how the traumatic events have influenced her personal growth, selfhood and sense of belonging.

How I Live Now (211 pages) is split up in two sections, offering two home-away-home structures that demonstrate different ideologies of home. The first, longest part (177 pages), demonstrates a home-away-home structure that could be described as traditional, where 'home' resembles the place where Daisy is born: New

York. American Daisy is sent to live with her cousins in England when her father and stepmother expect a new baby. With a mother who died in labour, and a father who never talks, Daisy feels unwanted, unloved. The 'away' in this structure is represented in the narrated events in England. Angry and anorexic, the fifteen-year-old is the opposite of happy when she trades New York for the English countryside. But when she sees the old house and meets the family, she feels as if she has always belonged there. Daisy falls in love with her cousin Edmond. The romance is soon to be disturbed by a world war. Separated by soldiers, she and her nine-year-old cousin Piper start a dangerous journey through the woods, desperate to find Edmond. They see the worst of war. But Edmond is not to be found. When they finally make it home, the phone rings. Daisy's father transports her back to New York, where she is reunited with her father, stepmother and newborn half-sister. The traditional home-away-home structure is completed, but with this homecoming the journey of Daisy is not finished.

The second part takes place six years after the journey. This is where a second home-away-home structure becomes visible. Daisy travels back to England to be with Edmond. Being with Edmond is portrayed as being at home. But what she finds is not what she has expected. The traumatic events of the war have scarred Edmond beyond repair. The old Edmond seems gone. Daisy has to let go of the notion of a home as something static, unchangeable in order to be able to be with Edmond. When she decides to stay, it is with the awareness of change in life. The narrative is completed with a progressive notion of belonging: the home-away-home structure has lost its sense of stability and finality.

Written by American writer Meg Rosoff *How I Live Now* describes England through the eyes of an outsider. Where Dutch Floortje Zwigman's *Een groene bloem* offers a London-born narrator to describe 'his' England, the American girl Daisy describes England as an outsider. When looking for nostalgia in cultural discourse, the choice for England as a setting draws attention to the topos of England from an outsider perspective. Another interesting point that valorises the choice for these two novels in an analysis of the function of nostalgia can be found in the sense of time. Zwigman's historical novel highlights some problematic aspects of narrating (Victorian England's) history and with that illuminates the relation between nostalgia and narrative. The futuristic plot of *How I Live Now* opposes *Een groene bloem* in this aspect. Through the unknown, expectations of what the real world looks like are

brought forward. *How I Live Now* can therefore shed light on the relation between nostalgia and prejudice in the psychological need to make sense of the world. It underlines and questions the psychological function of nostalgia with the desire for unified reality and unified selves.

Narrative device

The prejudice in the judgements of the focalisator is foregrounding in narrative, and demonstrates how Daisy's memories affect her understanding of herself and the world around her. The differentiation between prejudices and judgments is important to make, where judgment is actually a prejudice, since understanding of the world is always based on something in the past. *How I Live Now* foregrounds the prejudice of Daisy in two ways. Firstly, in a complete absence of quotation-marks in the narrative construction:

"Do you ever think about dying? Edmond asked me, talking on a tangent. And I said Yes all the time but mostly as a way of making other people feel guilty." (49)

The lack of quotation marks the narrative status of the events. Next to this expressed awareness about the reconstruction of experience through language, the narration of events foregrounds a disbelief in essential truth by Daisy herself. When the war starts and Aunt Penn disappears, the problem of narrating history is immediately pressed:

"[...] later when you look back on the whole story you realize that the moment she left was exactly the moment we all started skewing off into crisis like how Archduke Ferdinand getting killed started WWI even though the connection, to me at least, was never that clear." (27)

"a bomb [...] went off in the middle of a big train station in London the day after Aunt P went to Oslo and something like seven or seventy thousand people got killed.

This obviously went down very badly with the populace at large and was pretty scary etc. but to be honest it didn't seem to have that much to do with us way off in the country." (27)

These examples show how *How I Live Now* foregrounds the gap between real experience and representation of reality through narrative. The narrative technique underlines how all the narrative is influenced by the personal experience of its maker and, consequently, how this maker influences the literary manifestation of reality. Daisy never tells what the war is about or why it started. *How I Live Now* suggests that the reason for this lack of information is intentional, where Daisy questions unified history: "how Archduke Ferdinand getting killed started WWI even though the connection, to me at least, was never that clear."

The experience of reality is tied to personal identity, thence voicing a notion of reality that is fragmented, plural and fluid. A variety in personal experiences of reality highlights the difference between self and other selves. Subsequently, reality itself is presented as an unstable, unreliable personal experience, bound to presumptions about reality which makes some things 'feel' more real than other:

"I couldn't help wondering why life in a windowless barn thousands of miles from America surrounded by soldiers felt more real than most of the real life I'd ever lived." (127)

Daisy brings forward her presumptions about reality by distinguishing between the surreal event and 'real life'. This suggests that her personal experience of reality is tied to expectations of what real life is. Reality is experienced in interrelation with the unexpected; the self is experienced as other through the interrelation with all that is other.

In *On Longing* Stewart stresses that the narration of lived experience is always a (ideological) representation, because real experience cannot be met through narrative. That is why the past can be idealized through the memory called nostalgia. In *The Future of Nostalgia* Boym underlines the personal sentiment behind this idealization, considering nostalgia a sentiment of loss and displacement. She marks the concept "a romance with one's own fantasy"; a "nostalgic love [that] can only

survive in a long-distance relationship." (Boym: xiii) In *How I Live Now* such a long distance relationship between past and present, between then and now, is depicted in geographical distances: places and time become intertwined. The living-conditions change dramatically throughout the story, always bound to the idea of time. Daisy migrates from the United States to England. The descriptions of the United States are put to use to describe the past, where England is related to the narrated present of the journey.

When Daisy is not immediately picked up after her arrival in London, she thinks: "Oh Great, I'm going to be abandoned at the airport so that's two countries they don't want me in" (4), which suggests that her New York-family-past influences her interpretation of present situations. This is the self-evident, solipsist way she sees herself at the beginning of the story. Her journey through the unknown interchanges this feeling of being unwanted for self-awareness. Daisy starts to separate her self from the dysfunctional home she has left:

"For some stupid reason I started to cry and I felt completely choked with despair and worthlessness and I couldn't believe I was trying to lead Piper miles across England to find something the size of a microbe on a map when in my real life I couldn't even find a clean pair of underwear in a chest of drawers." (139)

The roadway: travel-narrative and coming of age

As questions about identity and deep doubt are always part of adolescence, being 'on the road' forms the perfect foundation for coming-of-age stories. The path through unknown land marks the transition between childhood and maturity, between innocence and experience, solipsist childhood and personal identity. Journey-based narratives such as *How I Live Now* are a central, vital element of children's literature. Protagonists leave a damaged home or inadequate home in search of a better place to live. In *Landscapes in Children's Literature* (2012), Jane Carroll elaborates how "these journeys are never simply geographical but represent a transitional period in characters' lives as they move from innocence to experience, from youth to maturity and towards independence." (Carroll: 112) An important part of the correspondence between travels and the transition from childhood to adulthood lays in the

uncertainties faced along the way. Unknown discourses, landscapes and languages, provide for the interrelations between self and other, and a way out of solipsism.

Daisy's feelings about who she is are linked to the experiences she has on the road through the comparison between what she knows about herself ("real life") and taking the responsibility to lead someone else through unknown lands. Through the experience of the unknown, for Daisy the experience of being capable of finding the way to Edmond, the former self starts to be questioned and can eventually lead to a new conception of personal identity, that is no longer bound to experiences of the home that is left behind, but to the experiences of life as it unrolls. The uncertainties felt during travelling, and changing ideas about who she is, can be found in Daisy's reference to her "real life, where the unknown provokes feelings of placelessness. Carroll links this feeling of placelessness to the topos of the roadway and shows how it provides for questions about identity:

"In providing a means of displacement, by removing the traveller from home and, by extension, from a fixed sense of place and identity, the roadway enforces a kind of defamiliarisation. By alienating the traveller from home, the roadway topos supports a new attitude towards home and causes the traveller to consider, and perhaps even revise, a sense of self." (Carroll: 95-96)

The notion that the revision of the self is linked to defamiliarization and an alienation and removal from home, sheds light on how travelling is just as much about discovering the new, as it is about the things left behind. There has to be something familiar in the past, something that made the traveller feel sure of his identity, to get that feeling of alienation and displacement, provoking strong feelings of homesickness. Carroll links defamiliarization to the concept of the 'home', often described as the place where people feel safe, where they can be 'themselves'.

In his collection of essays *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Michael Bakhtin stresses that it is innate to journeys to lead to the problematization of identity, as "on the road the spatial and temporal series defining human fates and human lives combine with one another in distinctive ways, even as they become more complex and more concrete by the collapse of social distances." (Bakhtin: 243). Bakhtin offers the image of the road as an example of the fusion of space and time that provides for

the richer image of 'a course', used widely in expressions such as 'the course of a life' or 'to set out on a new course'. (Bakhtin: 244). He explains how in travel-narrative, literary expression of the merging of time and space with the image of the road can illustrate the dialogical representation of subjectivity in fiction, based on the ideological assumptions about relationships between individuals and between individuals and society.

The idyllic chronotope

The mythology of home in traditional children's literature can be related to what Bakhtin calls the "the idyllic chronotope". In "The Idyllic Chronotope in the Novel" Bakhtin explains the narrative construction of the idyllic model for "restoring the ancient complex and for restoring folkloric time" in literature. (Bakhtin: 224) His notion of the idyllic clarifies how space needs time to become idyllic. It does not seem to need much else: "only a few of life's basic realities. Love, birth, death, marriage, labor, food and drink, stages of growth – these are the basic realities of idyllic life." (Bakhtin: 225-226)

In *How I Live Now*, the idyllic chronotope can be found in the description of the idealized images of the rural English landscape. This England comes straight from heritage industry. It is identifiable with well-known literary manifestations of 'good old England', described by Peter Hunt: "That golden world of the Thames valley is being subtly recreated by authors who quietly edit out the less attractive aspects of modern England. Thus the pharmaceutical laboratories near Alderley do not appear in *The Weirstone*, and perhaps most spectacularly, virtually the whole of human "civilization" disappears in Richard Adams' *Watership Down*." (Hunt: 13) In *How I Live Now* this idealistic portrayal of England is set next to the urban capitalist culture through the representation of New York, thus allowing for nostalgia "experienced as a sense of historical decline and loss "involving a departure from some golden age of "homefulness" [...] a sense of the absence or loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty [...] the sense of loss of individual freedom and autonomy with the disappearance of genuine social relationships [...] and the idea of a loss of simplicity, personal authenticity and emotional spontaneity." (Watkins: 167) According to Watkins, Nostalgia seems to be a persistent feature of Western culture, and can also be associated with:

“the loss of rural simplicity, traditional stability and cultural integration following the impact of industrial, urban capitalist culture or feudal social organisation.” In this century, nostalgia can best be seen as part of the response to “the dynamic and future-orientated nature of modernity” which had led to the dislocation, devaluation and disenchantment of everyday life." (Watkins, 167)

When looking for the significance of nostalgia in Meg Rosoff’s *How I Live Now*, it is worth bringing all levels of nostalgia under consideration. Distinguishing between restorative and reflective nostalgia is imperative when looking at the function of nostalgia in a postmodern coming-of-age story. The narrative device, which foregrounds the gap between real experience and identity, allows for such analysis of the function of nostalgia in the becoming of the subject. Where, as a travel-narrative, *How I Live Now* raises questions about the relation between home and identity in a twofold home-away-home structure, the psychology of the protagonist can be analysed in relation to the myth of the home and childhood innocence. Descriptive passages about the (natural) environment can be explored from the perspective of the significance of nostalgia in the representation of time and space.

‘What a weird place England is’ (6)

When fifteen-year-old Daisy firstly sets foot in England, she is struck by how green everything is, compared to what she is used to in New York. Although her cousin Edmond speaks the same language, the new place confronts her with new meaning to a word she thought she knew all about.

"Behind the house is tons of farmland some of which looks just like a meadow and some of which is planted with potatoes and some is just starting to bloom in an acidic yellow colour which Edmond says is rape as in rapeseed oil but the only rape I know is the kind you read about in the paper ten times a day and always ignore unless the rapist turns out to be a priest or someone on TV."

(10)

The rural portrayal of England, farmland covered with harmless, flowering rape, is contrasted with the dangers one is confronted with in a more urban society. Daisy describes the farmland as a *locus amoenus*, an idyllic place in nature, where she is 'expecting to see a deer or maybe a unicorn trotting home after a hard night. (13-14) The unicorn, a fantastic creature that only exist in the realms of the imaginations, directs the interpretation of this narrative, showing some sense of awareness of the impossibility for this picture to be part of real experience: it is too good to be true. This fairytale image – "It was getting to be like Walt Disney on E outside" (58)- even the word 'rape' loses all negative connotation. This makes sense if understood as a Bakhtinian idyll, which "strictly speaking, [...] does not know the trivial details of every day life, when compared with the central unrepeatable events of biography and history." (Bakhtin, 226)

Daisy's first description of England is that of a golden world, in which all ugliness is simply written out. Erased. It is a nostalgic image of good old rural England, constantly opposed to the ugliness of the city "where the traffic keeps you company" (13). What Daisy seems to experience is the cultural nostalgia for the old, rural and natural. It shows itself in an opposition between culture and nature. Daisy comes from the new land, where even the name of her city demonstrates how its history is always related to its European foundation. The old York; the 'real' York, is to be found elsewhere. In the old country. In England.

The fact that Daisy constantly compares both places is understandable, even if problematic. All she can relate to when she experiences those first days of her new English country life, is her life in New York. And all she remembers about that life, is that it wasn't so great. She thinks about her father, who is "probably feeling lots better" (17) now she is away. About her Mom, who "Died To Give You Life":

"It's a shame, starting your first day on the planet as a murderer, but there you go. Still I could live quite happily without the labels I picked up because of it. Murderer or Poor Motherless lamb." (22)

Not to mention Davina the Diabolical, her stepmother, who "would have liked to poison me slowly till I turned black like a pig and died in agony." (14) Daisy thus pictures not only her home as dysfunctional, but also her self. There is a clear relation

between home and self, which comes to the surface through the universal romantic ideology of home and childhood. An ideology Daisy explicitly describes when looking at her cousin Piper:

"All the big hunky types couldn't get over sweet serious little Piper whistling her magic whistle [...] and she must have reminded every single one of them of their little sister at home of the one they wished they had at home or possibly just the Virgin Mary [...] and you could tell most of them felt happy just being near her and that old Family Magic." (102)

Piper represents both the innocent child and 'that old Family Magic' and with that all that Daisy is not. Piper is according to Daisy "so good and pure that when she was confused about what was going on she just stood and stared at your face until you either told her the truth or just ran away and hid." (52) When a soldier sees Piper, Daisy notes how the "presence of Piper with her big eyes and pure soul made him feel like all he wanted was a chance to die to protect her." (125) Daisy is fully aware of the romantic discourse in society. She uses it to describe Piper, and at the same time dismantles the discourse as a fantasy through the use of the hyperbole and the explicit use of words such as 'magic whistle', showing the impossibility to make the realm of the imaginary meet with real experience. In the narrated events, Piper shows to be very much grown up.

"Piper was making tea and seemed worried that I'd had to get out of bed to get it. In New York, nine-year-olds usually don't do this kind of thing, but wait for some grown-up to do it for them." (15)

Daisy does not represent herself as innocent, but shows how the world, especially the world she comes from, marks children as innocent. It is an ideal she herself has been brought up with, as becomes clear when she describes Edmond for the first time.

"It's not exactly what you'd expect from your average fourteen-year-old what with that cigarette and hair that looks like cut it himself with a hatchet in the dead of night."(5)

"There is no way I'm believing any of this, being driven along on the wrong side of the road by this skinny kid dragging on a cigarette and let's face it who wouldn't be thinking what a weird place England is." (6)

When addressing her own life, this dichotomy between real life and the imaginary is expressed explicitly:

"[...] given how my life had gone so far, I'd had lots of practice in not expecting everything to turn out like your basic Hollywood tearjerker with the blind girl played by this year's Oscar Hopeful and the crippled boy miraculously walking and everybody going home happy." (34)

The romantic notion of self-determination is ridiculed as a fantasy not part of real life. At the same time, it shows how this idea makes Daisy feel dreadful about herself, because she feels she is still expected somehow to fulfil this image. The lack of 'Family Magic' in her own life is her fault, as she mentions how "it is a shame, starting your first day on the planet as a murderer." At birth, Daisy has already broken the cultural ideology of the innocent child and her desire to be that child is nostalgic. It cannot be achieved. "I was precious at her age too" (184), she states angrily when talking about her new-born half sister. But the fact is, that she was never approached as precious.

The impossibility to fulfil the expected role comes about in Daisy's anorexia. The word anorexia is never explicitly mentioned, but Daisy acknowledges that she uses hunger as "a punishment or a crime or a mode of self-destruction" (58) and expresses her love for Edmond as "I was starving, starving, starving for Edmond. And what a coincidence, that as the feeling I loved best in the world." (50) According to Sarah Ellis anorexia also serves as a plot device. "It gets Daisy to England, and it gets her back to America again [...] Daisy arrives in England with a pretty much impermeable membrane, a membrane of anger, scorn, boredom, and cleverness. The anorexia turns this from metaphor to concrete physical reality. Daisy will not let anything in. Or, by extension, out." (Ellis, 2008: 161)

The refusal of food is very much attached to Daisy's feeling of being unwanted and the inability to disengage from the dysfunctional home. Daisy's transition from solipsism towards maturity can be found in her new attitude towards food:

"And as I started to eat the pieces of mushroom I suddenly thought All this time I have been starving, and without noticing I said it out loud, so that Piper said So have I, without even looking up and I thought No you haven't, not in the same way and I hope you never are." (145)

Daisy no longer wants to erase herself because she can differentiate between her self and the dysfunctional home she grew up in.

Daisy's sensitivity towards the subject of belonging is illustrated by her reaction to her aunt, who wants her to have a photograph of her mom. "Aunt Penn said I could keep the photograph but I said No thank you because it seemed to belong to that desk and that room and I didn't want to drag it away to a foreign place." (26) Daisy shows here how insecure she is about her position with her cousins –she suggests she thinks she will have to go back to New York, dragging that photograph with her. But more interestingly, when it comes to the subject of nostalgia, is the way she thinks about photography. The photo of Daisy's mum in question is taken before Daisy was born. Daisy has no memory of the event where it was taken. According to Stewart, a snapshot, like any souvenir, is necessarily incomplete and partial, and "will not function without the supplementary narrative discourse that both attaches it to its origins and creates a myth." (Moran/Stewart, 163-64) Daisy feels exactly like this about the photograph. Her refusal is not a lack of interest in her mother's picture, but a yearning for that myth, to keep it alive. If she will take that photograph, it will no longer function as such. The nostalgic element of photography is very strongly felt by Daisy. Her mother looks "so different and happy and young like someone you've known in another life." (26) She experiences the unbridgeable gap between the desire stimulated by the present artefact and the event recorded by the photograph, the gap between sign and signified.

The image of the unbridgeable gap between desire and event that defines the nostalgic nature of photography seems applicable to the way Daisy experiences life.

When it's late at night, the phone rings. Daisy thinks it is her father and wonders, does he call to say:

"Hey I made a mistake sending my only daughter away to another country because of some scheming harpy's ruthless whims, but by that time I was too sleepy to bother getting up and wandering around looking for a keyhole to listen at. So as you can see, that old country must be doing me heaps of good already." (19)

Daisy shows a desire for her father's love and at the same time a realization that the events happening are not compatible with that desire. The nostalgic image of England as 'that old country' is used ironically, thus foregrounding the power of the sentiment inherent to heritage. When she talks about "Good old reliable English tea", she continues with the fact that "Two World Wars ago, battlefield nurses gave cups of tea to the wounded and it leaked through their bullet holes and killed them." (195) Daisy's use of irony gives away the pain it has caused her to be sent off to England. After all, etymologically, *irony* means 'feigned ignorance'. That is why Boym notes in *The future of Nostalgia* how, contrary to common sense,

"irony is not opposed to nostalgia. Just like nostalgia, irony is not a property of the object itself but a result of an interaction between subjects and objects, between actual landscapes and the landscapes of the mind. Both are forms of virtuality that only human consciousness can recognise." (354)

Hence, Daisy's feigned ignorance could be understood as a way to deal with a form of longing that is painful and hard to deal with, especially because she is only a fifteen-year-old and has no say in what happens to her. She is simply confronted with what happens and tries to understand. Daisy's ironic, sometimes almost sarcastic tone of voice in her journaling could also be understood from Gadamer's perspective, when explaining how every judgment is actually a prejudice, since our understanding is always based on something in the past. So if you have never had a place to call your home because your mother died in labour and your father sends you away to live in another country, one might expect this past to cause some different prejudices than for

those who always lived in the same place with two parents who loved them *no matter what*. For people like Daisy, 'underprivileged people' as Boym calls them, 'humour and irony were forms of passive resistance and survival that allowed affection and reflection to be combined.' (354) This passive resistance and survival become apparent when Daisy reflects on her situation:

[...] It's easier said than done to convince yourself that god has smiled on you when the actual fact is that you're living with strangers due to the evil workings of your wicked stepmother not to mention your official next of kin.
(37)

As it turns out, Daisy is trying to convince herself that she is happy in England, using heritage-images of England to idealize her surroundings. 'The old country' is represented in overstated, romantic descriptions of nature. But right here, at this very moment, it is clear how she uses the hyperbole so often to convince herself that all is great. Why? Because all is not so great. With her *arme du faible*, her 'weapon of irony', at hand, she has the possibility to show that she *does* miss things from her past life without putting herself in a vulnerable position. The black-and-white-phrases turn upside-down and show a strong sense of homesickness:

"I wanted to talk all this through with Leah right then and there and I nearly cried with how much I missed having a cell phone that worked and e-mail even if I did have a hundred and twelve wacky cousins instead." (37)

It is striking how Daisy tells the reader in the first chapter: "I can't remember much about life before the war anyway so it doesn't count in my book [...]." (3) And isn't it ironic that what follows is a journal that could be described as a dichotomy between Daisy's memories of New York and her experiences of England. The past matters a great deal in her journal because, as Gadamer shows us, it is vital in the process of understanding. So would it be too much to say that there would be no journal without Daisy's past? Daisy's ironic use of language, her remark on what counts in her book from this point of view, might be understood as a perfect example of ironic inversion.

Long-distance belonging

There is the complication to be reckoned with when it concerns Daisy's explanation about why her life before the war would not count in her book. And then, for once, keeping away from the obvious: that ever since Roland Barthes wrote his *Death of the Author* (1967) it is up to the *reader* what counts in Daisy's book *anyhow*. No. What complicates the notion of Daisy's little message to the reader on that first page is that Daisy's ignoring of a life before the war, that what she calls "my so-called life" (19), is feigned and thus expresses the ironic denial of a nostalgic desire for the mythological home that only exist within the memory called nostalgia. Where pre-war memories are constantly present when Daisy enters England, she expresses herself as one of the 'underprivileged people', exposing the nostalgic desire to belong through denial. The lack of a place called home makes the desire to return to such a place by definition nostalgic, as argued by Stewart:

"The nostalgic is enamored of distance, not of the reference itself. Nostalgia cannot be sustained without loss. For the nostalgic to reach his or her goal of closing the gap between resemblance and identity, *lived* experience would have to take place, an erasure of the gap between sign and signified, an experience which would cancel out the desire that is nostalgia's reason for existence." (Stewart: 145)

This explanation of nostalgic desire that can only exist through the absence of real experience, is in *How I Live Now* narrated on the basis of a discrepancy between a narrated experience of the dysfunctional home and the culturally idealized image of the home that signifies safety and belonging. The feigned ignorance puts emphasis on the awareness of Daisy that this desire is indeed unattainable. She knows, therefore, the reader knows. Daisy thus shows a reflective notion of nostalgia through her use of irony. She does not want to return home because it is her nostalgic desire for that same home that demonstrates the impossibility of return.

Striking is the change in tone after Daisy is separated from Edmond. Instead of feigning ignorance, Daisy then acknowledges her yearning to be with him. "Sometimes I thought I heard Edmond's voice in my head but it always turned out to be my subconscious replaying old tapes out of some perverse kind of nostalgia." (174)

Daisy is aware of the past playing games with her mind, aware of the reconstruction of the past influenced by nostalgic desire for the events that cannot be returned to. And yet again, the craving for Edmond is so big, that she keeps thinking she hears Edmond and keeps finding out that the past becomes timeless in her mind.

When Daisy is taken back to New York, she is forced to return to a reconstructed home – the home of her father. She notes how at that moment, she "entered limbo. For all that time I was waiting to come home. [...] The. Time. Simply. Passed." (185) It is the first time Daisy is so straightforward in using the word 'home' to describe a place she feels she belongs to. This place called home is: with Edmond, showing how Daisy has developed an untraditional, unstable sense of homefulness that is no longer attached to a place. Her nostalgic desire for Edmond, whom she thinks is dead, is so intense that it dominates the present. "What remains of my life depends on what happened six years ago. In my brain, in my limbs, in my dreams, it is still happening." (182) She seems to have no saying over what's happening. Nostalgia is simply ruling over her. Metaphorically, history does not belong to her; she belongs to it.

Landscape

When Daisy finally returns, the smell of England alone is too much for her. "When I stepped outside, the familiar smell of that rainy April day hit me so hard I felt dizzy and had to put my bag down and wait for the spell to pass." (187) The tone of voice has changed. This Daisy is not the same Daisy who first entered England. This is a Daisy who smells home because she remembers what it smells like. Her past still influences her present in a nostalgic sentiment that makes her dizzy. But it is no longer the New York-past that influences her experience. It is the England/Edmond-past that makes her dizzy.

Other than the memories of New York-times, times and events in England are quite often linked to spaces, landscapes and like the example of the rainy April day: the weather. Daisy's feelings are related to what she sees around her. But such a romantic relation between nature and emotions, is no longer tenable in war. When she is confronted with twelve decomposing corpses, the stench and the look of death hits her hard. Walking away from the scene, she cannot understand how the landscape

looks beautiful and full of life. She wants it to be in tune with that horrible experience:

"I expected the landscape to be barren and dead, but it wasn't. The hedgerows sagged under the weight of life: berries and flowers and birds' nests. It was like seeing a vision of some past life, a life so recent and so distant that I could remember the exhilaration without being able to remember what it felt like."
(156)

What she sees outside is, again, "Disney on E outside" but this time it does not relate to what is happening inside. The landscape, she realises, behaves on its own accord. The novel then suggests a growing sense of personal identity through Daisy's ability to distinguish her self from her surroundings. She perceives these surroundings as other. The more powerful, active role for nature, as something that cannot be messed with is also represented in post-war England:

"The airport was unrecognisable from my last visit, completely overgrown with gorse and ivy and huge pre-historic looking thistles. Just as Isaac had predicted, the landscape was happily romping away from civilization. I half expected to see stags and wild boars on the runway." (187)

Where the first part of *How I Live Now* offers an idealistic, fantastic image of 'the old country' - made explicit with the expectance of Daisy to see a unicorn - ugliness is no longer shed in this picture. 'Gorse' and 'thistle' are not the first plants one would think of to plant in an idyll. And a unicorn is nowhere to be seen. The mythical representation of England makes place for a realistic one, symbolizing how Daisy does no longer need to make things look better than they really are. Daisy accepts that life is not perfect, she embraces its difficulties and ugliness.

War has misshapen the country and the self, but in nature some kind of hopefulness for the future can be detected. Following the war, caused by "industrial, urban capitalist culture or feudal social organisation" (Watkins, 167) there is a longing for what's lost along the way: rural simplicity, traditional stability. Boym shows how such a "nostalgic reconstruction" of England in literature "is based on

mimicry; the past is remade in the image of the present or a desired future, collective designs are made to resemble personal aspirations and vice versa."(Boym, 354)

When Daisy returns at the farm, the animals are no longer kept "For Decoration" (10) -as they were when she first came to stay- and the "vegetable gardens were huge, with a section left untouched to provide seeds for next year. They had decided to be self-sufficient; it seemed the safest thing to be now, and the natural way for them to live." (192) Folkloric times are restored, with the farm as the centre of everything that happens, as the "family territory" Bakhtin speaks about. (Bakhtin, 224) Where the oldest brother moves out to live with his girlfriend, but "we still see him all the time" (192). Daisy's cousins have returned to the basic realities of idyllic life. Only Edmond seems incapable to leave the war behind him. He can find only one way to express himself: through his gardening. Daisy experiences the garden different than before. Now that she enters it again, she is shocked by what she sees.

"I've never had my own garden but I suddenly recognised something in the tangle of this one that wasn't beauty. Passion, maybe. And something else. Rage. It was Edmond, I thought. I recognised him in the plants. [...] The air was suffocating, charged, the hungry plants sucking at the earth with their ferocious appetites. You could almost watch them grow, pressing their fat green tongues up through the black earth. They emerged selfish and starving, gasping for air." (196-197)

The extensive information on the growth of the plants in this quotation can be related to painful, difficult process of growing up. This is what Daisy sees in the garden. The description of plants as "selfish and starving", "hungry", and with "ferocious appetites", suggests the importance of food for Daisy. When anorexic, she refused growth literally, by denying herself food. She did not want to take part in the painful process of growing up, symbolized in this picture of the garden. Renewal and life, symbolized by the green space, comes with "brutality and violence, decay and death", argues Carroll. (Carroll, 49) A Disney reference does not do justice to what it entails to grow. Both in nature and in adolescence. What Daisy sees in Edmond's garden, is what has happened to him in the war. It is eventually a Blood rose, "cut and pinioned into cruel horizontals against the wall, yet still wild and heavy with dark red blooms"

that tells her what Edmond cannot explain to her in words: that he has witnessed a massacre and "will never silence those unspeakable voices. He heard how people killed, and how they died." (210)

Because of its miraculous renewal, the green space is a symbol for human renewal, a spiritual regeneration. Edmond, who never before "cared that much for the garden", becomes a meticulous gardener who "couldn't stop even if he wanted to." (206) Thus showing a nostalgic desire for the rural, untouched that he cannot experience in life after the war. Edmond's nostalgic longing for an innocent world after his traumatic experience manifests itself in a very symbolic way when it concerns his work on a sculpture in the garden. Daisy remembers the sculpture very well from six years before, when Edmond's sister Piper told her about this "stone angel, about the size of a child, very worn with folded wings [...] it was a child who lived in the house hundreds and hundreds of years ago and is buried in the garden." (9) Now that Daisy has returned, what immediately strikes her is how

"The child angel had been cleared of moss and planted all around with snowdrops and white narcissus that poured out an overpowering scent. I thought of the ghost of that long-dead child watching us, its desiccated bones sunk deep into the ground below." (195)

Later, when Daisy watches Edmond in the garden, she realises that the way he sits there, is "as still and as cold as the statue of the dead child." (197) The image of the child evokes nostalgic memories of something innocent and pure. The nostalgic nature of the image of the dead is even stronger, as it calls to mind the famous picture of Peter Pan -or the child that will never grow up. With death, the child has become a timeless object and as such has, even after hundreds of years, the power to make Edmond and Daisy part of its world. It is quite clear though, that what Daisy sees combined in Edmond and the child angel, is rather more frightening than innocent. Edmond is of course not the child angel, but seems to long for the innocence that is resembled in childhood. This is the kind of nostalgia Jacqueline Rose points out in her research on our fascination for Peter Pan: "It shows innocence not as a property of childhood but as a portion of adult desire." (Rose, xii) As a child, Edmond did not care about the child angel being covered in moss. He did not plant white flowers

around it as to stress its innocence, because he did not feel guilty. Now, as an adult misshapen by war, he desires childhood innocence.

But of course, Daisy does not see all this. Daisy has been dying to come home, as in, to see Edmond, and he does not even talk to her. She gets so angry that at one point, she shouts to his brother: "WHY CAN'T HE HEAR THAT THE ONLY WAY I'VE MANAGED TO SURVIVE EVERY DAY FOR ALL THESE YEARS IS BECAUSE OF HIM?" (198, caption original) Daisy experiences the impossibility of nostalgic love Boym talks about. The kind of love that "can only survive in a long-distance relationship." (Boym, xiii) All those years, when she missed him, she had a relationship with her own fantasy. That is why Edmond is not talking to her. She does not see him. She wants her fantasy. Until she starts to accept change:

"[...] something happened. In the end, the warmth and the scent and the heavy slow buzz of bees seduced me, worked on my brain like opium, so the tightly clenched core of fear and fury that had sustained me all those years began to unfurl. I began to open too." (199)

Just like Edmond, Daisy was not living in the present. "What remains of my life depends on what happened six years ago. In my brain, in my limbs, in my dreams, it is still happening"(182), she states before leaving for England. Her nostalgic longing is now replaced by being with Edmond. Which turns out to be something entirely different. But Daisy does realise: "After all this time, I know exactly where I belong. Here. With Edmond." (211) She repairs her longing with a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

In *How I Live Now* nostalgia is foregrounded in narrative and at the same time reflected on through the use of the hyperbole, irony and the words used to signify the imaginary. The home as a nostalgic, timeless construction is questioned in order to give Daisy the opportunity to create her own home. This home is not unstable, not idealized, thus showing a disagreement with the plot of self-determination. Daisy has to let go of the belief in the idyllic home in order to find belonging with Edmond. The literary manifestation of the idyllic English countryside is overtly theatrical. It suggests an ironic stance with references to Disney-cartoons and the imaginary

unicorn. Similar are the descriptions of childhood innocence. The innocent child is described in the form of Piper with reference to magic, pixies and even the Virgin Mary herself. At the same time it is Piper who behaves like a grown-up, serving tea, cooking and knowing exactly how to survive. Piper can take perfectly good care of herself. She is a clever child.

Children in *How I Live Now* are portrayed as the opposite of innocent. They smoke, have sex and are happy to look after themselves. The only innocent child is the dead child. The link between death and innocence manifests itself in Daisy's desire to starve to death (anorexia) in order to be innocent. The relation between death and innocence gets depth with the actual dead child, buried in the garden. Just like Daisy, this dead child, buried under the angel statue, has desiccated bones.

The plot of becoming thence becomes a plot of coming alive. Childhood innocence cannot be lived. This means food needs to be eaten in order to grow, and the conception of the mythical home, mythical love, mythical country has to be forsaken. Self-determination is not found in a transcendental idea of becoming, but in the awareness that this transcendence is only an imaginary idea. *How I Live Now* suggests life as well as personal identity as fluent and pragmatic. These are ever-changing processes that should be lived with the awareness of being-towards-death. This idea about life is enhanced by the title of the novel. The ending depicts a sense of belonging that can only be experienced in the *now*.

6. Conclusion

Mapping Nostalgia and Awareness: The Need for Theory

Analysis of the functions and meanings of nostalgia in present-day adolescent fiction elucidates how the literary manifestation of postmodernity's rupture and continuation with modernity can effect in the challenge of the ideology of childhood. The use of nostalgia in narrative technique expresses and gives form to cultural ideologies of childhood, contingent with representations of subjectivity. Analysis of nostalgia thus crystallizes out a differentiation between the postmodern young adult novel and the modern, Romantic Bildungsroman.

Distinguishing between restorative and reflective nostalgia is fruitful where it clarifies how the presence of childhood nostalgia alone does not necessarily effect in the valorization of childhood innocence. Nostalgia manifests itself not only in reassuring narratives that valorise childhood nostalgia and humanistic concepts of individual agency, but also in narratives that feed into and challenge the dominant romantic ideology of childhood and represent identity as fluid and fragmented in all stages of life.

The difference between the American young adult novel *How I Live Now* and the Dutch Bildungsroman *Een groene bloem* is striking and suggests a relationship between the theoretical ambitions of the field of children's literature, and the literary manifestation of nostalgia. Although both genres seem equally popular in their own language area (*Een groene bloem* was never translated in English, *How I Live Now* is translated in Dutch), the question arises whether *Een groene bloem* would have been awarded literary prizes in a critical, highly developed Anglican field of children's literature. In the Netherlands it has been received as a young adult novel – which it is not in literary critical terms.

How I Live Now displays an awareness of poststructural theory and the reader is invited to question the ideology of childhood as part of contemporary culture. In *Een groene bloem* childhood nostalgia is foregrounded in narrative as a Victorian way to escape the difficulties of reality. This nostalgia is restorative, where it does not

think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. In this literary manifestation, it implies a critique on a Victorian tradition through the trilogy's excesses and manipulative, political power (the paedophile relationship). *Een groene bloem* does not reflect on nostalgia as a personal sentiment innate to modernity. Nostalgia as an emotional response, as a personal desire for the idyllic home and the safeties of childhood is used to invoke feelings of safety and belonging that the postmodernist would rather challenge.

So, it becomes clear that present-day coming-of-age literature can take a postmodern stance towards its Romantic lineage by exposing the construction of the child. However, this stance is dependent upon the use of reflective nostalgia and, therefore, on the use of contemporary theory on subjectivity in interaction with modernity's ideology of childhood. The postmodern ideology of identity is shaped by the reflection on the rupture and continuity with modernity's nostalgia. Challenging nostalgia through the use of irony, hyperbole and other narrative techniques affects the shape of the personal identity where it raises postmodern awareness and investigates how the individual can exist within society. When nostalgia is not used reflectively, but denied as truth or tradition or approached with hostility, this might lead to a plot that depicts growth reverently.

The dialogue between society and the individual that shapes subjectivity is present in both narratives. However, in the young adult novel this dialogue is extended to the interrelation between modernity and postmodernity in order to display subjectivity not as an opposition. This is how the young adult novel distinguishes itself from the *Bildungsroman*, where the latter only implies a continuity of modernity in present times. The belief in autonomy in the *Bildungsroman* results in an interrelation between self and other that gets jammed into the opposition, in which the former dominates the latter.

A realistic reconstruction of past, present and future is dependent upon nostalgic desire. Nostalgia functions as a group of universal sentiments, bound to ideologies offered in society. It shows what is important in the present and displays a desire for a better life through a desire for something unattainable and lost. The nostalgic desire for childhood as an inevitable lost past manifests itself in adolescent literature as a desire to belong, to be accepted and to feel part of something bigger. This desire is related to the notion of the unique, romantic individual. The presence of

nostalgia in literary constructions of the transition from childhood to adulthood implies that the romantic notion of selfhood is still very much alive in present-day society. Deconstruction of this nostalgia through the foregrounding of its dominant meanings demonstrates that ideology of childhood can be challenged through irony and that this reflection on nostalgia results in a different ideology of identity. That this is not necessarily the case becomes clear when comparing the American *How I Live Now* and the Dutch *Een groene bloem*. Although in both novels the transition from childhood to adulthood manifests itself as a dialogical process, only in *How I Live Now* this dialogical process leads to a plot that shows postmodern awareness. Where *Een groene bloem* implies an ideology of identity that belongs in modernity, *How I Live Now* presents both continuity and rupture with modernity by challenging the cult of the child in such a way that it affects the shaping of the subject.

As mentioned before, the authenticity-effect of nostalgia is dependent upon narrative technique and as such affiliated to the contribution of advancements in literary theory and criticism. How theoretical contributions can influence the function of nostalgia in the construction of subjectivity can be illustrated by means of a comparison between *Een groene bloem* and *How I Live Now*.

Een groene bloem represents childhood nostalgia as real, lived experience. It displays childhood as a fixed, separate state from adulthood. The child is represented as other from the adult to elucidate the transition from fixed childhood to unified adulthood. Adrian's desire to be a child again is represented as a memory of real experience. It functions as a literary representation of safety, belonging and acceptance. Adrian's first step towards maturity is pictured as a loss, through his sexual becoming. His sexual becoming means that he is no longer an innocent child but a homosexual. A reflective notion of childhood nostalgia can be found in Adrian's use of childhood innocence to make money as a male prostitute. Adrian thus demonstrates the dangers of the cultural construction of the child as a 'tabula rasa'. However, the irony of the sexual use of childhood innocence is represented as innate to Victorian culture. It does not expose childhood innocence as a myth. The innocent child in question has already grown old enough to create his own voluntary childhood memory.

Adrian's becoming is related to the notion that childhood nostalgia arises when real childhood is lost through maturation. The narrative displays a warning sign

with the character of Vincent, who wants to be a child forever in order not to be confronted with anti-homosexual discourse. Childhood is for him a refuge from the harsh realities of the adult world. This escapist behaviour makes him the anti-hero, but it does not challenge childhood nostalgia. In fact, it affirms the seductive fantasies of childhood as an idyllic Garden of Eden, unhindered by corruption. The desire for childhood as a pre-industrial Golden Age is displayed through the use of material survivals of childhood, that can be used to manufacture a voluntary childhood memory. Biscuits, birthday-presents, chocolate milk, random objects of everyday life, transform into narrative forms that deny lived experience. As souvenirs of lost childhood, they can be retrieved to visit a childhood that was never experienced, but only voluntarily remembered.

The transition from childhood to maturity is represented as the expulsion from paradise. The child has eaten that forbidden fruit called sexuality and is now driven out of the Garden of Eden. Constantly longing for some sort of idyllic life, the homosexual adolescent is now to overpower discourse and make his childhood dreams come true. Childhood nostalgia is used to construct a plot of self-determination. This results in an ideology of identity that displays an opposition between individual and society. Childhood is portrayed as a state of solipsism, in which the child has no idea that there is anything like society or sexuality. He does not distinguish between self and other. Growing up means not only learning to differentiate between self and other, but also a privileging of individual over society. Subjectivity is displayed as a concept of individual agency, with a capacity to act independently of social restraint. Adrian's role of the hero is enhanced through the use of the anti-hero Vincent, who is portrayed as disempowered and passive. This effect can only take place from a present-day perspective on homosexuality. In order to make present-day values for present-day readers conquer Victorian anti-homosexual discourse, Vincent's quite understandable anxiety about what he (and many Victorians with him) thought to be a 'disease' is made to look quite pathetic.

In *How I Live Now*, nostalgia is used to reflect on the relation between personal identity and dominant meanings ascribed to childhood in contemporary culture. Daisy finds it very hard to accept who she is and how she lives because she has a worldview that is nostalgic and therefore unattainable. It makes her feel disempowered and passive and most of all unwanted. She does not have nostalgic

memories of her own childhood and she thinks that is all her fault. Her desire to belong is completely based on dominant meanings ascribed to childhood because she never felt like she was a child. She realizes constantly that she was never innocent. This representation of the ideology of the innocent child shows how Daisy wants to behave accordingly and how this effects in a feeling of being unwanted and bad. She punishes herself with starvation. Her solipsism can be found in her inability to distinguish between herself and her dysfunctional home.

Growing up for Daisy means realizing that the innocent child does not exist and neither does the idyllic home, idyllic love etc. Through the use of the ideology of the innocent child *How I Live Now* relates subjectivity to the awareness of the gap between (ideological) narrative and real experience. The becoming of Daisy displays how awareness of discursive forces and institutions creates the possibility for a sense of personal identity. This sense of personal identity can be found in the way Daisy decides for herself where she belongs and that this belonging is no longer represented as a fixed and timeless home.

In *How I Live Now* nostalgic notions of childhood are deconstructed as imaginary and cannot be found in lived experience. The child is represented as a subject influenced and shaped by its surroundings. The transformation to adulthood is understood as a growing awareness of the power of these surroundings and the power of language. The awareness of this power shows an ideology of identity formed by interrelationships. It is through reflection that an ideology of identity arises that does not take subjectivity for granted, but neither is a determined outcome of social forces.

By looking at the relation between nostalgia and narrative construction it becomes clear that *Een groene bloem* and *How I Live Now* have a very different approach of language and ideologies and of a better world. *Een groene bloem* restores Victorian England in such a way that it can express a desire for homo-emancipation in present-day society. It is as such a nostalgic reconstruction of the past. The authenticity-effect of this nostalgia for an ideal world can persevere only because Victorian England cannot be revisited. Problematic is the fact that this is not made explicit in narrative discourse. For the portrayal of England through foreign eyes it makes use of a London-based, Victorian narrator and a personal choice of Victorian intertexts, which enhances the (false) authenticity-effect.

Such a representation of real experience is questioned in *How I Live Now* though the use of a future-England-setting, an American narrator/protagonist and the foregrounding of the narrative construction of reality in the text. The experience of England is always narrated as a dialogue between England and the United States, and unmasks the representation of England as the cultural-nostalgic assumptions produced by the heritage-industry. Next, the representation of England becomes overtly unrealistic through the use of the hyperbole, ironic inversion and comparisons with fairy-tales.

It is immediately clear that the represented world is deliberately constructed in such a way that there is no way around the fact that this representation is a personal experience of reality. This reading is enhanced through the lack of quotation marks. The narrative construction foregrounds how reality is always an individual collection of personal experiences and as a consequence stresses that there are many versions of the 'truth'. By foregrounding the important role of language in the representation of reality, nostalgic desire is reflected upon as an acquired, cultural belief. This notion of nostalgia is extended to the story of the protagonist, to show how her sense of self, her reality so to speak, is influenced by dominant, nostalgic assumptions about what life should be like.

How I Live Now displays a deep theoretical and philosophical knowledge of subjectivity and an awareness of nostalgia and the ideological differentiation between adult and child. The narrative draws from present-day developments in literary theory, which makes *How I Live Now* a more sophisticated read than *Een groene bloem*. The question is whether the difference between American and Dutch representation of the functions and meanings of nostalgia in adolescent literature can be related to the difference between the theoretical developments in the Anglican and Dutch literary field of children's literature. Although this cannot be validated, it can be argued that a more developed critical environment expects and stimulates complex, theoretical and philosophical representations of subjectivity and asks for a critical stance towards nostalgia in relation to ideological notions of childhood.

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