A Chronotope of Childhood in Narrative

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The word 'chronotope' (*xronotop*) was not invented by Michail Michailovitch Bakhtin but his application of it to literature, specifically the novel, has led to new ways of considering relationships in narrative between people and events on the one hand and time and space on the other. The term (from *chronos*, time, and *topos*, space) was a mathematical one relating to Einstein's theory of relativity which redescribed time not as the objective absolute of Newtonian physics, but rather as subjective, changeable, multiple, and dependent on the position of the observer. Bakhtin noted that he was using the term as a metaphor, then added in a parenthesis, ' almost, but not entirely.'[1] Be that as it may, the appropriation of the chronotope as a literary descriptor has provided us with an important critical tool; with, in Holquist's words, 'an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring.'[2] This tool or optic helps us to read beyond the mechanics of 'setting' and to rethink depictions of narrative time-spaces in terms of being essentially ideological, that is, as subjective, changeable, multiple and dependent on the position of the observer. In doing so however we cannot view the chronotope as separate from other significant aspects of Baktinian thinking. There is a 'living impulse' that emerges from the 'thickening' of time as it 'takes on flesh' and fuses with space to create the artistic chronotope,[3] and this living impulse in Bakhtin's work is intrinsically soaked in his ideas about *outsideness* and the *superaddressee*, and about language as *dialogical*, as *heteroglossic* and *polyphonic*, as *heterogeneous*, as intonated with the usually unseen richnesses and complexities of *the ordinary and the everyday*, as potentially marked by *great time* (the perspectives of centuries)[4] and also the *presentness* of each moment, as ultimately characterized by unfinalizability (*nezavershennost)*, but, most important of all, as inherently and immanently *creative*. All of these ideas affect in various ways the concept of the artistic chronotope, and offer an analytical language for its discussion. They also highlight the fact that the organization of time-spaces in narrative is complex and significant and can take on a multitude of different shapes and shapings. Such shapes and shapings are likely to reveal a great deal about implicit and explicit sociocultural and sociohistorical attitudes and beliefs. It is my intention here to discuss the organization of time-space in children's literature, not in a generic sense (that is, not in terms of genre, such as an adventure or fantasy chronotope[5]) and not as a means of examining one particular aspect of narrative (such as representations of subjectivity[6]) but rather, in a broader sense, as a major chronotope type, a *chronotope of childhood in narrative.* In doing so, I will be seeking to discover what, if anything, is distinctive about the characteristics of such a chronotope, and what, if any, generalizations can be made about such distinctiveness.

Children's literature is an artistically mediated form of communication a society has with its young. The nature of this communication is complex, bringing together an intersection of real and narrative time-spaces (at its simplest, those of the fiction, those of the writer, those of the reader). This is so of any book. What is different about children's literature is that it is written (almost always) *by* adults, but *for* children. So, even with this well-documented fact, we can perceive that the chronotope of such literature – the organization of people and events in relation to time and space – will be influenced, in one way or another, to some degree or another, by a dialogic interchange, a negotiation between generations. In one sense, this conversation is inherently one-sided (favoring the adult writers who write and the adult publishers who choose what to publish); in another sense it is less so, as the adult writes overtly for the child implied reader and both writers and publishers address themselves at least partly for the potential of children's response (reading the book or not). Such dialogism between two different cultural groups (adults and children) opens up the possibility that using the chronotope as an optic to study the nature of such an interchange may reveal not only how a society feels about its children, but also how that society feels about itself. Further, it provides a sharpening of critical focus in an area where it has been all

too easy to be fuzzy and less than critical; childhood is a palimpsistic presence in later lives and remembrances of time-spaces past lend themselves comfortably to mythologies. Bakhtin's ideas about *outsideness* alert us to the paradox that as adults we cannot and should not try to enter in to or empathise with the cultural time-space of childhood, and nor should we want to; rather, it is as outsiders (members of an adult culture) that we create the more fruitful possibility of dialogue, and in so doing (and here's the paradox), as outsiders, and preserving our outsideness, learn more about ourselves:

> A pure projection of myself into the other, a move involving the loss of my own unique place outside the other, is, on the whole, hardly possible; in any event it is quite fruitless … Aesthetic activity proper actually begins at the point when we return into ourselves and to our place outside the other person.[7]

Two related ideas are very important here and have clear implications in children's literature. Both pertain to the space element of the chronotope. Firstly, we can never really see from the other's point of view anyway; we may be in exactly the same surroundings (*okruzheniia)* but our field of vision (*krugozor*) will inevitably be different, because you can see me as I cannot possibly see myself. However, it is this very difference that provides the potential for creative understanding; as Morson and Emerson write, outlining Bakhtin's ideas:

> The essential aesthetic act of creating such an image of another is most valuable when we seek not to merge or duplicate with each other, but rather to supplement each other, to take full advantage of our field of vision. [8]

In other words, we can participate most fully in the aesthetic act of creating images of childhood in the spaces at the boundaries of our difference, precisely because we are not children but a creative other. The second point follows on from this and is one we need to consider carefully. We only see ourselves as fully as it is possible to do so when we see ourselves in relation to others; we *need an other as a reference point*. Therefore, and this is particularly significant in terms of a discussion about a chronotope of childhood in narrative, it is through this adult creative other, and *through the images of this aesthetic act, that children see themselves.*

Another seeming paradox pertains to the time element of the chronotope. Narrative time space is both a series of moments of *presentness* that contain specific meanings which are absolutely contained within that moment, within that particular fusion of time and space (cultural, social, historical, who is present, who is speaking and listening, how they feel towards each other, what has just happened, time of day, weather and so on), and, simultaneously, a *dialogised heteroglossia*, an accumulation of meaning and meanings that go far beyond specific presentness. Heteroglossia (*raznorečie*) refers to the linguistic complexity of the way usages (the 'talks' or languages of the everyday) play on established 'meanings' of words and alter them, taking away any semblance of their neutrality, and surrounding them with a great crowd of other utterances, that is, the utterances of others. This heteroglossia is dialogised because it can only emerge as part of communicative exchanges, as part of the many dialogues of the everyday. Prose writers make full use of the heteroglossic nature of language and extend its impact by populating it with their own voices and intentions. Therefore heteroglossia also refers to the 'double voice' of discourse, that is, discourse as both the voice of the fictional character who speaks, and - behind and around and through that – as the 'refracted' voice of the author working to achieve his or her narrative purposes:

> Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms of its incorporation) is another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. [9]

Words thus become multi-voiced, polyphonic and polysemic. The word 'space' itself reveals this polysemy (obvious when we think about its contemporary usage in the expressions 'cyberspace' and 'I need my own space'). Traditional notions of 'setting' in the novel generally referred to 'place' rather than 'space'. Bakhtin's concept of 'space' includes not just descriptions of place as geographical location but also the *perception* of place; this overtly attributes a temporal frame, and opens up the possibility of conceiving of objective place as multiple subjective spaces, inner as well as outer. Such perceptions tend to function, to slightly shift an idea of John Shotter, as 'extensions of ourselves';[10] he later points out the 'complex relation between people's identities and their "hook-up" to their surroundings'.[11] This is a familiar tradition in the history of children's literature: *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) provides a ready example; Gleeson's *Hannah and the Tomorrow Room*[12], a short chaptered novel about a child looking forward to moving into her own bedroom, is one of countless others. The Australian text, *Do Not Go Around the Edges*[13] is in one sense about the places of Daisy Utemmorah's life, but it is much more accurately described as being about space – her *perceptions* of place and of spaces where she belonged and did not belong, her yearning for spaces where she isn't, and her infilling of current space with dreaming. Many of the spaces in children's books are imaginative spaces, spaces of the mind; we think of Burningham's *Come Away from the Water, Shirley*[14] and Baillie and Tanner's *Drac and the Gremlin*[15]. Gleeson and Greder's *The Great Bear*[16] is about metaphors of space – in generic terms its chronotope is that of a folk tale, 'the fullness of time in it'[17], but it plays on ideas of cosmic space as well.

Decisions about what is chosen to be depicted as part of the relationship between time and space, and people and events, reflect artistic and ideological assessments of worth. Morson and Emerson note that 'because for Bakhtin all meaning involves evaluation, chronotopes also define parameters of value.'[18] In Bakhtin's words:

> Chronotopes are the organising centres for the fundamental narrative events of a novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative. [19]

In *Johnny, My Friend,* Peter Pohl uses an accurate geographical location of Stockholm in the 1950s as his organising centre of narrative events, thereby linking maps of place with maps of the contemporary youth culture of its time and providing a realism that works, from the opening lines, aesthetically to validate the portrayal of characters:

> Now then, lads, do you recognise this? Says the cop, lifting out Johnny's bicycle.
> We flash the whites of our eyes to each other, but nobody feels the urge to volunteer. The cop's mate is still sitting there in the cop car, wittering into his mike. The corner of Swedenborgsgatan and Maria Prästgårdsgata. About ten young lads. I'll get back to you.[20]

Tove Jansson organises her Moomin stories around the time-spaces of a Valley which is removed from most specifics of time and place, where 'the clocks stopped ticking' in winter, where fairytale isolation is clearly marked as beauty and space for adventure, and where any fear of such isolation is softened by favorite symbols of care and security:

> When they reached the top [of the hill] the March wind gambolled around them, and the blue distance lay at their feet. To the west was the sea, to the east the river looped around the Lonely Mountains; to the north the great forest spread its green carpet, and to the south the smoke rose from Moomintroll's chimney, for Moominmamma was cooking the breakfast.[21]

J. R. Rowling has chosen to organise her Harry Potter books around a centre in which the space element (the representation in descriptions of suburbs, attitudes and language of a ironically stereotypical English social class) is clearly defined from the first few lines but in which the time element is vague:

> Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange and mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense. [22]

The first page of *Dance on My Grave*, by Aidan Chambers, overlays his description with ironic metaphor and clearly indicates the times-space of his teenage narrator:

> The beach, that first day, was a morgue of sweating bodies laid out on slabs of towels. Sea and sand at sunny Southend.
> We had lived in this Londoners' playground at the mouth of the Thames for seventeen months, my father, my mother and me, and I was still not used to a town whose trade was trippers.
> There was talent about, bared to the imagination.[23]

All of these writers have made decisions (likely to be both conscious and unconscious) about what is of value and significance in the organisation of their narratives, and what will be most effective in communicating their chosen time-spaces to their readers. In each, we can perceive the double voice – in the quoted excerpt from *Johnny, My Friend*, for example, the voice of the young narrator reporting the voice of the policeman clearly establishes the significance of peer solidarity in adolescence, and its othering of authority; this is part of Pohl's narrative intent. In a further refraction, we first 'see' the boys in a time-space described by the adult other, but reported by one of themselves.

The chronotope, writes Bakhtin, 'provides the ground essential for the showing-forth, for the representability of events.' Note how quickly a few lines describing narrative time-space establish this ground in the examples quoted above, and, as an example of a different type of text, in the first few lines of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678)*:*

> As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted at a certain place where there was a den, and laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream.

What impulses inhere in that which a society 'shows forth' to its young as it concerns itself with the construction of their literature? Applying the idea of the chronotope in this way will not give all the answers, but it gives us a point of departure. There are three broad points, one sociocultural, relating to theoretical understandings of the young, one pedagogical, relating to perceptions of teaching the young, and one literary, relating to the significance of story as pleasure.

Firstly, that a society seeks to show forth anything at all reflects a confidence in the receptiveness of the young. In a discussion of the adolescent novel, Kristeva, who in her early years was very much influenced by Bakhtin, notes that she understands the term 'adolescent' less as an age category and more as 'an open psychic structure.'[24] She discusses adolescence in psychoanalytical terms, noting that it 'opens itself to the repressed at the same time that it initiates a psychic reorganisation of the individual'.[25] This provides an obvious and immediate insight into many books for older readers, including *Johnny, My Friend*, in which the protagonists are clearly involved in an organisation/reorganisation of identity initiated by the conflicts, paradoxes and tensions between new-found freedoms and pre-existing social and moral realities and constraints. It also opens up interesting possibilities for discussing adolescence in Bakhtinian terms of creative boundaries. Kristeva's analogy of the 'open systems' of living organisms, which 'maintain a renewable identity through interaction with another'[26] is not only a particularly fruitful way to consider the culture of adolescence as represented in fiction; it also provides a metaphor for the chronotope in action.

This clearly leads into the second point. Part of the organising impulse of the chronotope of childhood in narrative is pedagogical. The history of literature for the young has traditionally implied that children are, if not 'open psychic structures' or *tabulae rasae*, certainly 'open' and receptive to being influenced and led in particular ways, and acutely sensitive to interaction with each other. So books for children were organised around conventions designed to 'teach' and 'socialise' and 'acculturate', in earlier times about

religious and moral concerns, in later times about general education, and most recently about social issues. This organising principle shaped both story and discourse. Thus the book usually described as 'beginning' Australian children's literature[27], Charlotte Barton's *A Mother's Offering to Her Children: by a Lady Long Resident in New South Wales* (1841) not only transparently teaches the child characters about such things as the botany and flora of the new colony; the highly contrived format in which Mamma (Mrs Saville) and her children interact expresses a chronotope organised around ideas about the value of teaching and knowledge:

> Julius.- Mamma we ought not to overlook the Fig Tree.
> Mrs. S.- Indeed, we ought not, Julius. It is not only splendid, but a very remarkable tree. The stem or trunk of the tree appears to be enveloped in drapery. The Red Cedar is also a handsome tree, and so is the Sassafras. I think the smell of the bark very agreeable; and you know it is used medicinally.

Children, such narratives imply, need to be taught, and books should teach. It is important to note however that, from the beginning, the very notion of teaching via a book supposedly being read for pleasure suggests a particular type of teaching strategy and a particular view of children. This leads to my third broad point: the attraction of story. Such a view suggests that children may not want to sit and be taught, so an attractive 'sugar-coating' is put on the pill. These books seek to announce very publicly that they are not formal school books, nor textbooks – thus the use of illustrations and decorative prints and cover pictures, and, most important of all, the pretence (or if that is too harsh a term, the layering) of *story*. It is just such a pretence of story that is the organising centre of the otherwise bald explanations of books such as *A Mother's Offering to Her Children*. 'Story' then is conceived as pleasure; it is also part of a long multi-cultural tradition of societies communicating their histories and beliefs to themselves and to their children.

Does our culture still hold with the belief that books should teach through the pleasure of story, and if so, what is now being taught? Even a cursory survey of the last twenty years of at least Australian children's literature reveals that the impulse to teach remains alive and well, and that while there is certainly a great variety of beautiful books, the ideological impulse of many of them is the advocacy (that is, in this context, the teaching) of particular stances on social issues. These issues include, most notably in the last years of the old millennium, the environment, indigenous cultures, multiculturalism, the changing shape of families, and gender and gender roles. Thus the matrix of people and events, and time and space in these books is 'shot through with chronotopic values of varying degree and scope'[28] that reflect the concerns of what Bakhtin calls 'the world that creates the text'.[29]

This world that creates the text is a provocative concept. Clearly it refers, at least, to an author, and a publisher, and the children, parents and teachers who represent market forces. In pragmatic terms, the author's primary attention lies no doubt with being published and then with being bought. So the author is creator of the text and writes for an implied child reader, but already we can perceive a shadowy world of adult readers (whose presence by convention is not generally acknowledged) hovering around. How much do children's writers write for these other adults, and how much does this influence a chronotope of childhood in narrative? Shavit notes that authors write in varying degrees for adult and/or child,[30] but such an approach is too simplistic when we shift the focus from the reader to the created text, which is a product not only of author and illustrator, but of forces at work in the sociocultural context.

The significance of this context/world can be seen in what Genette calls paratexts, that is, the material which is liminal to the text, in the zone between off-text and on-text - the 'public' part of the book that includes blurbs, dedications, excerpts from reviews, afterwords and so on.[31] This paratextual material is designed to communicate, but not always to the implied reader of the actual text, and it is not always written (or seen to be written) by the author of the actual text. For example, the Australian picture book writer and illustrator, Jeannie Baker, includes at the end of her books, after the story and beautifully-wrought

pictures, a serious message and explanation; that of her most recent publication, *The Hidden Forest*, is an explanation of kelp forests and a description of how she constructed the artwork. It reads in part:

> Jeannie Baker made a number of visits to Tasmania's Tasman Peninsula where she went snorkelling and scuba-diving to explore at first hand the magic of its kelp forests. Jeannie constructed the artwork using a multitude of collected natural materials including seaweed, sponges and sands. The kelp was modelled with a translucent artist's clay and the wet seawater with resin.[32]

Further, compare the languages of text and afterword in an earlier book by Baker, *Where the Forest Meets the Sea*. The first and second pages read:

> My father knows a place
> we can only reach by boat.
>
> Not many people go there,
> and you have to know the way through the reef.

The text of the afterword reads:

> The place, the people, and the predicament are real. This forest is part of the wilderness between the Daintree River and Bloomfield in North Queensland, Australia. There remain at the making of this book only 296,000 acres of wet tropical rain forest wilderness that meet the ocean waters of the Great Barrier Reef. Small as it is, this is the largest pristine area of rain forest left in Australia.
> The artist made two extensive field trips to the Daintree Wilderness to research and collect materials.
> These relief collages are constructed from a multitude of materials, including modeling clay, papers, textured materials, preserved natural materials, and paints.
> The collages are mostly the same size as the reproductions.[33]

Such an afterword is clearly included to give authenticity to the advocacy of the text, but it also reflects a great deal about the world that creates the text, ideas of story as pleasure, and the desires of a culture to 'show forth.' When an important issue is at stake, someone – perhaps the author, perhaps not - decides that story has to be explained, contextualised, authenticated, in some cases so that teachers and parents are armed with more facts, in some cases to justify the stand being taken (or is the message also being addressed to them?).

Barbara Wall postulates a theory of children's literature which stresses the significance of *writing to children* as the marker of *writing for children*, and which therefore sees the relationship between narrator and narratee, not implied reader and implied author, as the distinctive feature of a children's book:

> While the presence of the implied author pervades the text and colours and controls the reader's response, at any and every given moment it is the narrator who 'speaks.' And although the idea of the implied reader is being shaped by the gradual unfolding of the text as a whole, at any and every given moment it is the narratee to whom the narrator speaks. [34]

Wall describes this relationship by the terms *single address* (the writer addressing children without consciousness of the possible presence of adults), *double address* (the writer consciously addressing both audiences in a variety of ways) and *dual address* ('a fusion of the two'[35]) She argues that children's literature has broken away from some of the condescending practices of earlier times, such as talking to adults above the heads of children, and has developed a mode of address which 'emerged in the first half of the [last] century'[36] and which is more genuinely and specifically a form of single address directed to children.

There is certainly less condescension but there is nonetheless room to argue that this statement is rather problematical. As we have seen, not only are there other implied readers of

contemporary children's books who exert a powerful influence on the organisation of the text, but there are strong social forces that also have a great deal to do with its popular advocacies. Indeed, it is the growth of interest in children's literature, both as an academic field and as an area of enhanced community awareness, that has developed in some places a sense of super-acute political and literary correctness. (I am not by the way including Baker here; she is a committed and gifted artist with a genuine passion for the environment). In many ways this has been positive: writers and illustrators have become increasingly aware of postmodernist theory, and deliberately experiment with multiple focalisations, metafictional devices, gaps, intertextuality and multiple time-spaces. However, it does imply the presence of multiple addressees influencing the telling of the tale.

There is however a gentler way to consider this idea of authors writing on fashionable topics that reflect current concerns, or writing for the critical approval of academics and literary judges. This is one that does not so much demean either the child implied reader or the writer. Bakhtin noted that as part of the organising structure of any text there is a 'higher' *superaddressee* who is 'a constitutive aspect of the whole utterance', and whose 'absolutely just reponsive understanding is presumed.'[37] It can of course be argued that this superaddessee should be the child, but is or isn't; or should be perhaps 'wise' adults who are therefore equipped to reiterate the messages of the text. I wonder, however, if the superaddressee of many children's books - the person who is, deeply and inherently, a constitutive part of the whole utterance - is neither of these but, rather, *the adult the child will become.* For it seems to me, that if there is one particular distinctive characteristic of the chronotope of childhood in narrative, it is the creation of a present that has a forward thrust.

This is not to say that the implied reader is not the present child. It is, of course. But it is the child conceptualised both as *present* and *potential*, as *unfinalizable* and *creatively alive* within a sense of *great time* - a larger perspective. Note that I am also implying here an idea of reading that reaches beyond an enclosed and finished meeting event of text and reader. Reading, the physical and cognitive process, may end when the book is closed, but *reading*, dialoguing with own experience and worldview (past, present and yet to come), and the role of the reader in what Bakhtin calls 'renewing the work of art'[38], and carrying that into the real world and own world, may continue for a lifetime. Reading, as well as writing, is a creative act:

> The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers.[39]

In reality, the whole *raison d'etre* of teaching is to prepare children for adulthood; the equipping for 'now' is part of this process. Here, then, is a glimpse of another presence (not the only one, the present child is there as well) in the address of the text, a sort of incipient otherness; in the forthcoming future of the child (who as I have noted elsewhere is in a continual state of 're-creation'[40]) is the adult who will actually have the agency to care for the environment, to respect indigenous rights, to play a responsible social role. Again, this is not to play down the agency of children – of course they can work to preserve the environment by caring for their space – home, school, community. But their period of greatest agency will be as adults.

This is also why the chronotope is such a helpful term in the discussion of children's literature in particular. The time element in children's books – represented as it is in multiple ways - takes on a different type of flesh, a thickening that is specific to itself, a thickening that is fluid and temporary and likely to change. Its present is sometimes uneneding, but even an unending present, and a terrible moment of presentness, is underwritten with future, and the possibility of change and transformation. If we consider 'the process of the reading' to extend beyond the physical act as I have argued, this gives an interesting perspective to Eco's words:

> …[T]he model author and the model reader are entities that become clear to each other only in the process of reading, so that each one creates the other.'[41]

The forward thrust of children's narratives implies possibilities and options. This potential to create difference in circumstance is the essence of the fairy tale, but it is also present in a text such as *Dance on My Grave*, which is about, among other things, coming to terms with death. Consider these lines which occur a page or so before the end:

> There's something ahead for me; I can't see what it is yet, but I know it is there, waiting[42].

Perhaps we could say that the chronotope of childhood in narrative is a chronotope which inherently, sometimes obviously and sometimes not, focuses on change, growth and becoming. Thus where there are afterwords and other paratextual materials, they are written for the child to grow into, perhaps be helped into, achronologically, sometimes in hindsight, sometimes very quickly. This is a part of the potential of childhood, part of the notion of children as open psychic structures, as well as being of course another expression of pedagogical activity, which is similarly concerned with deliberate interventions in the processes of change and growth. Children's books then imply a notion of what Bakhtin called *open wholeness* – the child reader who is wholly child at this moment, but who is open to change, for whom change is inevitable, and who will ultimately become wholly 'other.'

Perhaps this idea will have something to contribute to those continuing vexed discussions about what constitutes a book for children and when a children's book is not a children's book. It is texts without this forward thrust, that are enclosed and closed in time, that propose no change and no possibility of change, which are those most likely to be rejected as books for children. This rejection emphasises the way that the social forces of the community outside the text, which is essentially looking *back*, wants to conceive of the future it projects in the time-spaces of children's narrative. I believe that this forward thrust and this momentum towards another wholeness of present indicate that while children's books should be realistic as well as fantastic, should be diverse as well as particular, should present different versions of what it is to be, was to be, and can be, they should also be characterised, immanently, by the idea of an *ethics of hope.*

The potential for this hope emerges from the fact that childhood, despite its seeming emphasis on the present and perhaps because of it, is an unfinished state. Childhood has the space for time, and the time for space. As we have seen, we can relate this to Bakhtin's idea about *unfinalizability*, which accepts the general chaos and mess and unfinishedness of the world, but which perceives such unfinishedness as positive potential and *openness* to freedom and creativity:

> Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future.[43]

If indeed children tend to see themselves through the aesthetic images that are created for them, as was suggested earlier (and this is an accepted precept in terms of advertising, so why not literature?) then an ethics of hope becomes more than a philosophical nicety; it surely becomes a social imperative. Part of such an ethics of hope is the presentation of difference and of *different images and possibilities of beingness*, something that many picture books are doing extremely well. This is particularly significant in a commercial world where increasing globalisation bombards young people with images of similarity and conformity (to have certain shapes of bodies, to wear certain brands of clothing, to eat certain types of snack foods and toys, to speak certain languages and act out certain behaviours). It is also time that we honestly consider the images of adolescence that some young adult texts offer their readers in relation to this idea of an ethics of hope.

So one of the features of a chronotope of childhood in narrative is, with some notable exceptions, present infused with future, rather than (as in many books for adults) present

infused with past. This is so even when the time being constructed is a sentimental version of pastoral perfection - what Bakhtin called a 'bucolic-pastoral-idyllic chronotope' (1981, p.103). This time-space is like a cameo, or a Victorian miniature, tiny and perfect, framed and separated from the incursions of the real-time world. It is the 'dream-time/idyllic time' of fairytales, or of books such as *The Wind in the Willows*, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and the *Moomin* stories; it has been constructed as a retrospective by adults who imbue it with sanctity and would seek to keep it untouched, even as they know that it inevitably will be. This is also time with a forward thrust, but this thrust is not initiated by excitement and growth within, but is an inevitable, sorrowful, unwilling propulsion by immutable forces without.

It is interesting to consider this idea of time in relation to the simultaneous principle, a practice in mediaeval art where a number of events that must obviously have occupied different pockets of *time* are expressed in the same *space*. Nikolajeva applies this idea to the depictions of story in the visual art of picture books[44]. It can also be applied to considerations of the time-spaces of verbal narrative, helping us to identify and clarify the distinctive chronotopical feature of forward thrust in the midst of present concerns. A brief comparison of two books, one a book for older readers and one a book for adults, may help to demonstrate this idea. Both these books have won honours, which signifies cultural approval and endorsement for what they 'show forth.'

Brian Caswell and David Phu An Chiem's *Only the Heart* was named as the Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book in 1998 and has also been set as a school text in at least one Australian state. *Beloved* is a Pulitzer Prize winner and its author, Toni Morrison, received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. These books are different in scale but they have a number of similarities: both are based on historical fact and overtly seek to confront the horrors of the past, both deal with the aftermath of war, both focus on displaced families isolated by time-events into spaces with little or no agency (the plight of Vietnamese boat people in *Only the Heart*, and the treatment of American blacks in *Beloved*). Both books are chronotopically organised around legacies of wars and operate on a type of simultaneous principle, with a circular composition moving in and out of time spaces that span a number of years and places. Both have child and adult characters (both of which at various times are given narrative voice), in both people die in terrible circumstances, in both children grow, and become adults.

It must be stressed that I am not here considering either the relative horror of the historical realities on which these books are based, or the 'value' or 'worth' of each book in any sort of a comparative sense; and nor is such a comparison helpful. As I have noted in a number of other places, children's literature *is* literature, and is part of a *literature continuum (*see, for example, Johnston 2001). Its texts are concerned with the same sorts of issues that concern that wider continuum, and in different ways address similarly complex and abstract themes and ideas. This is part of its significance, because, in so doing, it prepares a receptiveness to later encounters with more complex texts, pushing out conceptual horizons (remembering that Iser discusses the notion of 'themes' which attract the reader's attention and which are viewed against the 'horizons' of what has gone before).

The differences in the time/space organisation of these two books begin with the paratexts. The dedication of *Only the Heart* begins '*For all those who lived the Nightmare, in search of the Dream'* and then follows this with expressions of personal thanks which implicitly stress collaboration and authenticity. Morrison's dedication is cryptic and succinct: '*Sixty Million and more*.' Here is a glimpse of a different time inscription, one horrifying and complete, circumscribed and enclosed; one which acknowledges the horror but which focuses on the possibility of escape. The following passages from the texts are equally revealing.

Beloved[45]*:*

1. Paul D had only begun, what he was telling her was only the beginning when her fingers on his knee, soft and reassuring, stopped him. Just as well. Saying more might push them both to a place they couldn't get back from. He would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut. He would not pry it loose now in front of this

sweet sturdy woman, for if she got a whiff of its contents it would shame him. And it would hurt her to know that there was no red heart bright as Mister's [a rooster] comb beating in him.
Sethe rubbed and rubbed, pressing the work cloth and the stony curves that made up his knee. She hoped it calmed him as it did her. Like kneading bread in the half-light of the restaurant kitchen. Before the cook arrived she stood in a space no wider than bench is long, back behind and to the left of the milk cans. Working dough. Working, working dough. Nothing better than to start the day's serious work of beating back the past. (pp. 72-73).

2. Daily life took as much as she had. The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind. And if it didn't stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out. Slave life; freed life – every day was a test and trial. (p.256).

Only the Heart[46]

3. But you grow out of everything, even despair. Sure, there's a certain satisfaction to be got out of feeling bitter, but it hurts people, especially the people you love, and you can't keep doing it. Either you let it destroy you, or you start doing drugs or booze, which is about the same thing. Or you shake the crap out and get on with what's left of your life. (p.201)

4. I don't know why the gangs have to be part of a community which is almost obsessively law-abiding. It just doesn't seem to make any sense.
My grandmother would probably see it in terms of balance. Good and evil, light and dark, the yin and the yang.
Me, I don't think the universe is organised quite so neatly. (p.205)

5. Then we make our way outside and the tin-can sound of a scooter rises above the noise of the crowd. It moves like a memory across my path and for a moment the years drop away [the protagonist is now an adult, a father himself]. But only for a moment. I am tired from the trip and I can feel the sweat on my hands. I grip the urn more lightly.
Not long now.
Soon she will lie next to my grandfather, and I will say the words to give her spirit rest. Though a medium of Quan Yin should have no need of words to give her peace.
Thanh has written a poem of farewell, and he asks that I read it to her when she is at her final resting place. He's printed it out for me; I've got it folded up in the pocket of my shirt.
But it isn't really necessary. I know it by heart.

To Vo Kim Tuyet 1919-1996
Our years, like leaves,
Drift and fall away;
Piling up, memory upon memory,
Joy upon sadness,
Until the smile and the tear
Become One.

And the One becomes All.

Our dreams, like children
Grow from a song of the heart;
We know the melody;
But we cannot tie it down
To sounds the ear can taste.
And yet it lives within us

Through our dreams,
Through our children.

And the words are like years,
Drifting like leaves;
And the rhythm is a pulse,
The beat of life and death.

For the song is a journey
And the journey is a song

That only the heart can sing …

It is of course impossible to generalise from only two texts, and there will be many exceptions to any rule. Nonetheless, I suspect that subsequent research may reveal more concordance than discordance to the argument suggested by this comparison. Discourse lives, writes Bakhtin, 'in a living impulse (*napravlennost*) toward the object; if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life.'[47] [48]

Conceptualising the Visual Chronotope

As the reference above makes clear, Bakhtin of course was referring to a chronotope expressed in the language of words – that is, the verbal text of the novel. However, the literary concept of the chronotope, and the idea of a chronotope of childhood in narrative, becomes even more interesting, and more complex, when we conceive of the idea of a *visual chronotope*, and consider its application to the text of picture books.

A visual chronotope is the representation of time-space in picture book art and illustration. Just as Bakhtin's original concept of the chronotope recognises its ideological loadings, so does its extension into the idea of a visual chronotope; what is selected to illustrate time-space will reflect personal and social values and attitudes. For example, a clock on the space of a wall is a clear time marker, but its repeated presence with different times (particularly short intervals) and as a central presence may also reflect pressures and stress.[49]

However, the identification and recognition of a visual chronotope is significant not only because it proposes another theoretical framework and language for identifying and discussing how meaning emerges from the interaction between words and pictures in picture books, but because it enlarges ideas about the images that characterise a chronotope of childhood in narrative. Picture books have both a verbal and a visual chronotope. These chronotopes may be 'different', but if so it will be this very difference that will give the text the 'meaning' which as readers we perceive, but may not be able to describe. In Bakhtin's words:

> Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex relationships. [50]

The consideration of picture books in terms of the chronotope, and the recognition of the possibility that it is both a verbal and visual chronotope (which may or may not match) that constitutes the organising structure of the text, also offers a fruitful critical relationship to Bakhtin's own examples of specific chronotopes. Two of these are of particular interest.

One of the chronotopes Bakhtin discusses is the *intervalic chronotope*, where as part of the narrative two different perspectives of time and space play out against each other, and action is perceived from two different chronotopical perspectives. One may be 'hidden', but the interaction between these perspectives means that 'both of them take on metaphoric significance[51]' Clearly, an understanding of this chronotope offers a new way to describe, say, Burningham's *Come Away from The Water, Shirley*[52], or Baillie and Tanner's *Drac and the Gremlin*[53], or *Jag såg, jag ser*, by Håkan Jaensson and Gunna Gråhs[54]. It describes particularly well the wonderful book by Thomas and Anna-Clara Tidholm, *Resan Till Ugri-La-Brek*[55], where the child protagonists go searching for their dead grandfather, across the football field, through the snowy forest, through the desert, across a beach, right to the other side of the world into an icy land, where they find and talk with him, and then return home. The hidden intervalic chronotope reveals that all this has happened during play in their yard;

their parents on the balcony were glimpsed as they made the children made their campfire in the snowy forest, and are clearly seen having afternoon coffee on the children's 'return.'

I am not interested here in any sort of a genre, but in characteristic; it seems to me that the deliberate organisation of two different time-spaces as part of picture book structure indicates that a chronotope of childhood in narrative features a concept of time and space that is unbound, and that represents a deliberate recognition of imaginative potential and a setting free from adult perceptions by the adults themselves who are the creators of the text.

Resan Till Tgri-La-Brek could also, although less aptly, be considered in terms of another type of chronotope identified by Bakhtin, the *adventure novel of everyday life*, where time-space is organised as 'a new type of adventure time' that is a 'special sort of everyday time.'[56] Here the emphasis is not on two perspectives of time and space being quite different (reflected in the visual chronotopes of the parents' and the children's experience of time and space in *Resan Till Ugri-La-Brek)* but rather on a perspective of time-space - and life itself - as being simultaneously, within the one chronotope, both critically personal and individual, and *just as critically* something which reaches beyond individual experience, but which in so doing imbues individual experience with further significance. This is a notion of time that draws past and future into the experience of the present moment, but with an inclination towards change. The adventure novel of everyday life is a temporal sequence of 'metamorphosis' or 'transformation' which is linked with 'identity' as part of an 'idea of development'[57]; it presents moments of 'crisis' – that is, critical points of a development that 'unfolds not so much in a straight line as spasmodically, a line with "knots" in it' (p.113). In the early Christian 'crisis hagiographies' Bakhtin notes as belonging to this type, 'there are as a rule only two images of an individual' (p.115) - a sort of 'before' and 'after' that are both 'separated and reunited through crisis and rebirth' (p.115). He goes on to expand this idea:

> From what has been said, it should be clear that a novel of this type does not, strictly speaking, unfold in biographical time. It depicts only the exceptional, utterly unusual moments of a man's life, moments that are very short compared to the whole length of a human life.

The novel used as a model for the discussion of this chronotope is Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, and Bakhtin describes in great detail concomitant features that relate directly to this text (for example, such themes as individual initiative, chance, guilt, and redemption).

These are not relevant to my argument here, but I do want to pick up the basic notion of a chronotope of the 'adventure novel of everyday life' with its representation of critical incidents (another way of considering moments of *thisness)* as '*knots' of becoming.* This is surely an expression of childhood, and it is certainly an expression of childhood in narrative. Here again is the sense of forward thrust, of momentum towards future, of the paradox of childhood as being both intense presentness, acutely and vitally realised, and larger moment, or 'great time'.

Applying the idea of the visual chronotope helps to explain how this happens. For example, the text *Hello Baby*, by Jenni Overend and Julie Vivas (1999), tells the story of a home birth (particularly apt in relation to the 'rebirth' idea of this chronotope). It is focalised through the eyes of Jack, the third child and youngest sibling. The verbal text is clearly organised by the chronological time-space of the labour – time is part of the structure of events. It locates the time-space of these events as being near a 'town' more rural than urban (a neighbour drops off 'a load of wood' as 'a present for the baby'), and reasonably contemporary: the midwife brings 'oxygen' and 'a special microphone for listening to the baby's heart'; there is a 'phone'; and the family has 'sleeping bags'. The illustrations of the visual text depict clothes of an indeterminately modern period, and a similarly indeterminate house; the pictures of preparations for the birth imply rather than detail window, chair and table. The first of the two illustrations of the scene outside the house shows a water tank and a wind-blurred forest of tall trees (both reinforcing the rural impression); the second depicts part of a house and a woodheap, with Jack (the narrator) and his father collecting wood.

This is a clearly a critical incident, 'a knot', in the life of the mother, the family, and the child about to be born, concentrated around the moment of birth, which becomes the

threshold of the 'before' and 'after.' Nothing will be the same again for any of them – and cutting (and knotting) the cord is both end and beginning. However, it is also an everyday moment – babies are born, many of them at home, all the time.

Considering this text in terms of a visual chronotope can also be used as a metaphor for the essence of my argument – that the chronotope of childhood in narrative is forward-looking, is characterised by an ethics of hope (not quite the same by the way, as being 'hopeful'), and most of all constructs childhood within a sense of time-space that - rather than dislocating the personal moment of the child, or discounting the significance of the child's present - extends personal moment and present into the spaces and perspectives, and increased significance, of 'the fullness of time' and 'great time'.

Of course, in traditional terms and without using the idea of a chronotope, critics can note that the wildness outside operates as a Shakespearean-type macrocosm to the microcosm or minicontext of this baby's birth, that the illustration of the forest, and the tall (even phallic) trees dwarfing the small figure of the pregnant woman walking against and into the pressure of the wind evokes clear intertextual associations to the forests of folk and fairytale – enchanted woods that keep out or keep in. In the Australian context, we could also note that it accesses the idea, powerful in our literature, of the bush (or desert or other wild place) as a space of healing and redemption, of finding oneself, of gathering together physical and emotional resources. All of this however, does not quite explain the power of this text.

However, if we apply the idea of a visual chronotope, and in particular an amended idea of a visual chronotope of the *adventure time of everyday life*, it becomes possible to describe the literary process that gives *Hello Baby* its impact. We enter the text *in medias*: 'We've been waiting a long time for this day, Mum, Dad, Bea, Janie and me.' Preparations have started. This sense of an elongated period of waiting refers both back and forward, but the verbal text is telling a predictable story of a special but far from unusual occurrence. However, the visual chronotope works from the beginning to interrogate conceptions of present as being able to hold the whole story, and pushes time beyond the everyday into a sense of adventure time, and even of a folkloric conception of time that contains a sense of 'time's fullness.' Jack, the previous baby, holding up the jumpsuit on the title page, invites the reader-viewer to engage with not only the comparative smallness of the coming baby, and the transformational process of his own growing, but also the sure knowledge that this baby yet to be born will similarly transform and outgrow the space of this moment. The swirl of preparations for birth become increasingly focused on the figures and their relationships which are made visual in the representation of touch, overlap and interconnection; the space surrounding them is little more most of the time than a pinkish-red glow. Later, as they sleep around the fire after the baby's birth, in a visual image that is almost tribal, the background space becomes darker and the fire, implicated, gives a golden light.

That the visual chronotope has few space markers reaches the moment of climax in the picture of the newly-born baby on the white page, thrust into present and the cord its only connection to the moment before. In a sense, this baby has become Every Baby, just as the illustration immediately following is another version of the iconic Madonna and Child. The next double page spread places the baby in the world, the aerial perspective allows his face to become the central focus and to gaze beyond the page; it also allows the reader-viewer to see the 'beautiful' placenta, the life-giving sustenance that as life begins is no longer necessary.

The visual chronotope of *Hello Baby*, and its organisation of time-space as reaching beyond the sequential units of verbal text and thrusting towards future, is a representation of what a chronotope of childhood in narrative looks like. In different ways, to different degrees, and with sometimes different outcomes, it is a similar chronotope that can be perceived in a huge range of books as diverse as the Ahlberg's *Each Peach Pear Plum*, Gleeson's *Eleanor, Elizabeth* and *Where's Mum?*, Paterson's *Bridge to Terebithia*, Marsden's *Tomorrow* series, Hill and Barrett's *Beware, Beware*, Ottley's *Mrs Millie's Painting*, Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, Isadora's *At the Crossroads*, Hutchins' *Rosie's Walk*, Browne's *Piggybook*, Nodelman's *Alice Falls Apart*, Pullman's *Northern Lights*, and many others. There are also notable exceptions where space and timescape has the 'specific insular idyllic landscape' of a pastoral chronotope, and is structured more in terms of 'a time

saturated with its own strictly limited, sealed-off segment of nature's space' (DI p.103). The accompanying sense of wistful nostalgia that characterises many of these texts is an indicator of the fact that the future is always there, and that the time they celebrate is already lost.

Exploring the organisation of time and space in narrative, and considering the particularities of the representation of this in children's literature, helps us to understand a little more the impulses that give life to these words society chooses to have with its young. Such impulses are likely to be characterised by this forward thrust and, generally, the responsible carriage of an ethics of hope, that is, a depiction of future that may in fact be difficult and imperfect, but that is nonetheless characterised by principles of potential and possibility. The notion of a chronotope of childhood in narrative draws together literary and pedagogical ideas that emerge out of a common message: childhood is not stasis, but growth and change. Kristeva notes that 'each speaking subject is both the addresser and the addressee of his own message … .' Is this a message, then, that we would also hope to give ourselves?

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