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Childhood, Loss and Art in Masefield's Harker Novels

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Abstract. During the interwar years, John Masefield wrote three novels featuring a male protagonist with the surname "Harker" struggling against an adversary called Abner Brown. The first of these novels was written for an adult audience, the remaining two for children. The chronological sequence of these three novels and the relationship between their characters is far from clear, although the recurrence of names and places gives the impression that they should be read in connection with one another. In the present study, I will argue that the trilogy, whose settings correspond to specific periods of the author's own life, can be read as a tripartite reflection on childhood, loss and the redeeming power of art.

Key words: John Masefield, Harker novels, medievalism, colonial literature, children's literature

1. INTRODUCTION

During the interwar years, Masefield wrote three novels whose male protagonists shared the surname "Harker": *Sard Harker* (1924), The *Midnight Folk* (1927) and *The Box of Delights (or When the Wolves were Running)* (1935). The first of these novels is an adventure novel written for an adult audience and its eponymous hero was an adult. The other two works were fantasy stories written for children and their protagonist is a young boy – Kay Harker. All three novels feature a villainous antagonist named Abner Brown. In *The Midnight Folk*, Kay is seeking to retrieve lost treasure from Santa Barbara, the fictional central American state which is the setting of *Sard Harker*. The name "Crowmarsh" also appears in all three novels, with Sard Harker's aunt being called Lady Crowmarsh and the Crowmarsh estate lying next door to Kay Harker's home at Seekings house. Masefield, then, clearly expected his readers to draw connections between the three works. However, the temporal and geographical information provided in the novels themselves makes it very difficult to understand how they might be read as forming any kind of chronological sequence. In *The Midnight Folk*, Kay tries to solve the mystery of the Santa Barbara treasure which his great grandfather was wrongly accused of stealing.

The Abner Brown of that novel, who is the ringleader of a coven of witches and a practitioner of black magic, tells us that both his father and his grandfather shared his name and travelled to Santa Barbara. The most obvious conclusion, then, would be that Sard was Kay's great grandfather and the Abner Brown of the earlier novel, an apprentice of the dark magician Sagrado B, was an ancestor of the dark magician of *The Midnight Folk*. Yet we are told that the events of *Sard Harker* begin in 1897, and the setting of *The Midnight Folk* would appear to be chronologically earlier, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, since there is no electricity, travel is by horse and cart and the housemaid Ellen refers to "my grandfather's time, in the French wars" (Luhrie 2004, 75; Masefield 1967, 140). Moreover, whereas we are told that Sard's baptismal name was Chisholm, Kay's great grandfather was named Aston Tirrold. The relationship between the "Kays" from the two children's novels is, in some ways, even more complex. The Kay of *The Box of Delights* is ostensibly the same little boy that we meet in *The Midnight Folk*. He still lives in Seekings House with Caroline Louisa, who becomes his guardian at the end of the earlier novel. However, the historical setting of the later novel, with its electric Christmas-tree lights, fast motor cars and aeroplanes, would appear to reflect the contemporary world of the 1930s when the novel was written (Luhrie 2004, 75-6). Ultimately, I would argue that these three novels reflect not so much a logical narrative sequence as an ongoing reflection on the themes of childhood, loss and the redemptive power of art, issues which were of central importance to Masefield throughout his career, in part because of his own abruptly interrupted childhood and the devastating experience of war.

2. MASEFIELD: MAN, BOY AND POET

Masefield repeatedly referred to his early childhood as "paradise." Thus, for example, he begins his autobiographical account of his early years, *Grace Before Ploughing*, with the words,

> For some years, like many children, I lived in Paradise (Masefield 1967, 1).

In the tradition of Rousseau's *Emile* and Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and *Intimations of Immortality*, Masefield depicts childhood as a transitory state of visionary enlightenment, irretrievably lost with the passage to maturity. Hence, the poetic "Prologue" to *Grace Before Ploughing* is as follows:

> Once, looking north, the daisied meadow filled,
> With multitude, by miracle, unwilled,
> Men, of no mortals born,
> Splendid as flowers, many as the corn,
> Marching with banners to a tune that thrilled,
>
> I saw, I heard, I marvelled, but they ceast …
> Naught, but the meadow grass was north and east,
> I cried, "O come again …
> You singing men out-numbering the rain,

And take me, too, to conquest or to feast."

I trod the rocky road of no reply.
They trod a way unseen by mortal eye
To some immortal end,
With life for bread, with ecstasy for friend,
Their very substance that which cannot die.

Still, in my heart, that marching music rings,
Those faces glow of men whose wills were wings.
Powers, by beauty shriven,
A spark of immortality has given
An immortality to mortal things (Masefield 1967, xi).

This poem suggests that there exists a fleeting moment in childhood when the subject perceives the true, immutable forms ("their very substance that which cannot die") beyond the Platonic cave. Significantly, the repeated use of natural analogies ("splendid as flowers, many as the corn"; "out-numbering the rain") suggests that something of this vision is accessible through the natural world. At the beginning of the final stanza Masefield tells us that he still recall something of the rhythm, the musicality, of the vision – "the marching music." Grammatically the closing sentence is rather confusing, since the relationship between "powers" in the first clause an the "spark of immortality" in the second is far from clear. "Powers" are "shriven" by "beauty" – but which powers and what kind of beauty? The singular verb form "has given" means that the "spark of immortality" is not attributed to the plural "powers" at the beginning of the sentence. Indeed, the second clause would appear to be entirely independent of the first: "A spark of immortality has given / An immortality to mortal things." Why, then, has Masefield placed a comma rather than a full-stop between these lines? Perhaps the "powers" are those of the human artist, "shriven" or redeemed, despite their fallen state, by their ability to perceive and poetically evoke beauty, The ineffable nature of the relationship between these powers and the ever-present but elusive "spark of immortality" in "mortal things" is dramatized in the obscurity of the final epigraph, whose syntax strains and ultimately fails to bridge the gap between them. This linguistic endeavour and failure of the poet is in contrast to the state of the mysterious subjects of his vision "whose wills were wings" – for whom volition is equivalent to realisation, to ascent. This contrast can be read, at least on one level, as reflecting the contrast between the directness of pre-lapsarian Adamic language and the mimetic difficulty of the post-lapsarian world. In biblical terms, the fall of language is closely connected to the misdirection of the human will. For as long as the will of humanity was freely aligned with that of the creator, human language was universal and there was a direct correspondence between words and things (hence Adam's naming of the plants and animals in Eden). The language of Eden was lost at the same time as the human "will" lost its "wings", falling into subjective, individual desire.

None of this is very original. Masefield's Wordsworthian vision of childhood, nature and poetry is the fruit of the Romantic legacy he inherited growing up in the final years of the nineteenth century. Yet Masefield's vision of childhood, loss and the redemptive power of art achieve a particular uniqueness and poignancy due to certain aspects of the

author's own early life. Masefield's idyllic childhood in Ledbury was abruptly interrupted when he was six years old by his mother Caroline's death during childbirth. His father's mental health steadily deteriorated in the years which followed, in part because of the family's increasing financial hardship, and he died in a local hospital when Masefield was twelve. After his mother's death, Masefield and his siblings were left in the care of their aunt Kate and Uncle William, who were scornful of their young charge's bookishness and imaginative life.

Masefield's aunt and uncle sent him away to train on the school ship HMS Conway in 1891 at the age of thirteen. The initial impact of this transition was brutal. However, to quote his biographer, Constance Babbington-Smith,

> Jack's second year in the Conway was a time of happiness for him. He had by now mastered the arts of shipboard life, and in class, under a sympathetic master, he was able to turn his mind to subjects that really interested him, such as English and history, For a while, he assisted in the ship's library, and in every spare moment he picked up a book. After Treasure Island he discovered Marryat, Herman Melville, and Mark Twain, and he soon became imbued with an intensely romantic attitude towards the sea and ships (Babbingron-Smith 1978, 33).[1]

These romantic ideals, however, met with a harsh reality-check when the sixteen-year-old poet set out on his first voyage as an apprentice aboard the Gilcruix in 1894. During this voyage around Cape Horn Masefield suffered chronic seasickness, sunstroke and ultimately "some kind of mental breakdown" (Babbingron-Smith 1978, 42).

Rather paradoxically, then, the author best remembered for the poem "Sea Fever" was no sailor. Yet throughout his career he referred to tall ships such as the Gilcruix, which by the 1890s were already in their twilight years, in nostalgic, elegiac tones. Perhaps the clearest example of this are his writings collected in the volume *The Wanderer of Liverpool* (1930). *The Wanderer* was one of the last great tall ships:

> She was the last achievement in sailing-ship building and rigging: nothing finer had been done, or ever was done (Masefield 1930, 13).

On October 17 1891, during his first year as a cadet on board the Conway, Masefield saw *The Wanderer* sail out from Liverpool on her maiden voyage. Eight days later she was towed back into the same port, having been wrecked in a storm which had cost her captain, Captain Currie, his life. Of the stricken ship, Masefield wrote:

> It was the morning of Sunday, the 25th of October, in fine bright weather, she left her anchorage, an image of such glory and beauty and desolation as I shall never forget … I have seen much beauty, but she was the most beautiful thing (Masefield 1930, 26).

Masefield's vision of the sea was profoundly conflicted, characterised by brutality, suffering and loss but ultimately redeemed through a transcendent beauty.

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[1] Masefield describes this period of his life in his autobiographical volume *New Chum* (1945).

Masefield returned from his voyage on the Gilcruix convinced that the sea life was not for him and "once more hoping to be a writer" (Babbington-Smith 1978, 46), an attitude which was met with hostility by his aunt Kate, who at once organised for him to join the crew of another ship, the Bidston Hill. In desperation, Masefield abandoned ship when the Bidston Hill docked in New York and lived as a vagrant for some months before finding work, first in a rather seedy saloon and then in a carpet mill. Curiously, it was during this period that he first developed a passion for Medieval literature, buying and endlessly rereading copies of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* and Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*. He stayed in Yonkers until 1897 when he finally sailed home.

In the decade and a half which followed, Masefield's literary career gradually took off, as he was welcomed into Yeats' circle from 1900 and published *Salt Water Ballads* in 1902, *Ballads* in 1903, *Ballads and Poems* in 1910 and *The Everlasting Mercy* in 1911 and. In 1913, following the death of Alfred Austin, there was already some speculation that he might already become the next laureate (Babbington-Smith 1978, 123), even though he did not actually achieve this honour until 1930.

Yet the onset of the First World War opened up another irreparable fissure between the past and the present – between lost innocence and unprecedented experience. At thirty-six Masefield was too old to serve in the Great War, but he spent much of the period alternating between volunteering in field hospitals and writing and lecturing for propaganda purposes with a view to gaining further American support for the war effort. Masefield's "public" patriotic writings of this time seek to locate the war effort within an ancient tradition of war and heroism. *Gallipoli* (1916) takes its "Preface" from the *Chanson de Roland* (Errington 2007, 49) and the elegiac "August 1914" (Errington 2007, 35-6) likens the deaths of soldiers in the trenches to those of "unknown generations of dead men" in the past who made a similar sacrifice in pursuit of a patriotic ideal:

> And died (uncouthly, most) in foreign lands
> For some idea but dimly understood
> Of an English city never built by hands
> Which love of England prompted and made good.

However, an unpublished poem which Babington-Smith found in "a small leather-covered notebook" and dated around 1917 paints quite a different picture of Masefield's wartime experience:

> I was a little child
> Laughing so merry
> At the blue wind flower
> And the black berry
> I was a little boy
> With a mind eager
> Going with a friend in joy
> At the goal's leaguer
> I was a lad with thoughts
> Of hot devotion
> A ship bound for all parts
> Of every ocean

I was a man, with life
With purpose gathered,
With my found mate, my wife
With children fathered.
I had no dream, but this
To grow in power
To see my children's bliss
Push shoot and flower
Then this began, this crime
This hell of evil
This bloody smear on time
Done by a devil
And all began again,
No more, oh never
Love, beauty, power of brain,
Peace like a river.
But in the mind a hell
Of terror, waiting
For the blind thrusting shell
To have his mating
Now in the mud a rag
A skull bone clinging.
By the clear brook the flag
Is gold i' the springing
In the green garden gay
My wee son's planting
The scarlet wind flowers sway
To the wind's flaunting
No joy in them, those three
In the spring's glory
There is no joy in the bee
No lift in the story. (Babbington-Smith 1978, 177-8)

Here we find no continuity between the horrors of the First World War and past heroics. The war is a "bloody smear on time" which has led to an irreparable schism from which there is no going back ("No more, oh never") and no hope of redemption and new birth ("no lift in the story").

Masefield's "story" certainly did continue after the war. He moved to Boars Hill near Oxford and continued writing for the rest of his life, becoming poet laureate in 1930. Yet with the dawn of modernism and the rise in popularity of figures such as Eliot, Pound and Joyce even the world of literature must have seem altered beyond recognition and Masefield in many ways never quite caught up with it. Looking back over his career in 1951, Masefield rather whimsically reflected,

> I thought it was long known that I am like the dodo and the great auk, no longer known as a bird at all (Vansittart 1985, 39).

3. *SARD HARKER*

Sard Harker is set three years after Masefield's own rather disastrous maiden voyage around the Cape of Good Hope and in the year when the author finally returned to England after his period adrift in New York. The novel is a rather curious - and not entirely successful – combination of a quasi-Medieval quest narrative and a descent into a Conradian heart of darkness.

Sard Harker is set in the fictional state of Santa Barbara in 1897, ten years after the troubles which led to the fall of Don Lopez the Terrible and the rise to power of the new dictator, Don Manuel. Don Manuel began his rebellion following the execution of his fiancée, Carlotta, who refused to pray before Don Lopez when he declared himself a God (Masefield 1924, 1). Carlotta had her throat slit in the square of the new town, together with Aunt Jennings, who had refused to accept Carlotta into the house of prostitutes over which she presided. Don Manuel's first rebellion was unsuccessful, with all of his troops being gunned down. He himself was saved from the sea by the English ship The Venturer, where he met Captain Cary and a younger Sard Harker for the first time. Eighteen months later, Don Manuel launched a fresh attack with a new company, this time successfully overthrowing Lopez (Masefield 1924, 3). Don Manuel became the new dictator of Santa Barbara, which became the "new Athens" of Spanish-speaking America:

> We first meet Sard on board the Venturer, in 1887, where he spots the white walls of the house Los Xicales and is told in a prophetic dream that this is where he will meet a girl, Juanita della Torre, who he had met in childhood and "whose idea filled his inner life intensely" (9). The Venturer sails away and Sard is unable to go ashore but "the memory of the dream remained intense" (10).

Sard and Captain Cary return to Santa Barbara aboard the Pathfinder ten years later and Sard has another prophetic dream, telling him that the meeting at Los Xicales is to occur that day. Attending a boxing match on-shore, Sard overhears a plot to kidnap a young woman, Margarita Kingsborough, who is staying at Los Xicales. As he heads off to warn Miss Kingsborough, a new passenger, the suspicious-looking priest Father Garinston, is admitted on-board. Sard's warnings fall on deaf ears and soon after his departure, Margarita is kidnapped by Abner Brown, a henchman of Sagrado B.

Sard leaves *Los Xicales* to discover that his bicycle has been stolen. Taking a wrong turning into a swamp, he is injured by a stingray and loses his passage aboard the *Pathfinder*. From here on the narrative increasingly acquires the quality of a delirious nightmare. Sard boards a train with a group of smugglers, by whom he narrowly avoids being murdered. Falling asleep, he misses the connecting train to Las Palomas, being carried instead deep into the desert. He is imprisoned at the next station, where he risks being executed if he is unable to provide a bribe. Realising that he has no chance of getting on another train, Sard decides to walk one hundred and seven miles across the wilderness and desert to Las Palomas.

After an increasingly arduous journey over mountains and desert, during which Sard sleeps and has prophetic dreams in ruined chapels and temples, risks death on numerous occasions and walks through rocks carved with gruesome depictions of human sacrifices, he finally finally reaches the city of Santa Barbara, where he learns that the Pathfinder has been wrecked and Captain Carey is dead. He manages to rescue Margarita, who

proves to be the very same Juanita with whom he fell in love in childhood. Sagrado B is on the brink of making a human sacrifice of them both when Don Manuel's men burst in and save them, executing the dark magician. Sard decides to abandon life at sea and to stay in Santa Barbara to help Don Manuel govern Santa Barbara.

As its title suggests, *Sard Harker* is a novel concerned above all with its eponymous hero. It is a narrative which charts the transformation and redemption of its central character through a process which constitutes, significantly, a recuperation of a mythical childhood and an affirmation of the redemptive power of art and literature. Its trajectory, like that of the "Harker" trilogy as a whole, is therefore in some ways opposed to that of the classic *Bildungsroman* and to the "progress"-centred ethos of the colonial project.

The omniscient narrative voice and perspective which opens Sard Harker is very much that of the colonial chronicler and cartographer. The opening vision is one of what Anne McClintock terms "panoptical time" – "the image of global history consumed - at a glance - in a single spectacle from a point of privileged invisibility" (McClintock 1995, 37):

> Santa Barbara lies far to leeward, with a coast facing to the north and east. It is the richest of the sugar countries. Plantations cover all the lowland along its seven hundred miles of seaboard, then above the lowland is foothill, covered with forest, rising to the Sierras of the Three Kings, which make the country's frontier.
> The city of Santa Barbara lies at the angle of the coast in the bight of a bay. The old town covers the southern, the New Town the northern horn of the bay: in between are the docks and quays (1).

Here and in the passage cited below, the landscape is commodified with the proprietorial vision of a Western colonizer:

> Las Palomas, where this story begins, is far away to windward on the sea-coast of the Tierra Firme. It has grown to be an important city since the northern railway was completed. It has been a frequented port since the days of the Conquistadoores, because it is a safe harbour in all winds save the north, with good holding ground and an abundance of pure water for the filling … Las Palomas was formerly mainly a coffee and sugar port, but of late years it has become a great place for the exportation of copper-ore from the mines at Tloatlucan, only seven miles inland (7).

The narrative voice proceeds from this orderly, bird's-eye view of the spatial realities of the country to an equally empirical narrative of its history which, although fictional, sounds as if it might have been taken from a school textbook.

When we are introduced to Sard Harker, through whose perspective the events of the remainder of the novel are to be channeled, we are initially led to expect a personification of this ideal and vision. The sonnet which introduces Sard ostensibly praises his distinctly "adult" qualities: rationality, stoicism and imaginative and emotional restraint:

> A lean man, silent, behind triple bars
> Of pride, fastidiousness and secret life.
> His thought an austere commune with the stars,
> His speech a probing with a surgeon's knife.

His style a chastity whose acid burns
All slack false formlessness in man or thing;
His face a record of the truth man learns
Fighting bare-knuckled Nature in the ring.

His self (unseen until a danger breaks)
Serves as a man, but when the peril comes
And weak souls turn to water, his awakes
Like bright salvation among martyrdoms.

Then, with the danger mastered, once again
He goes behind his doors and draws the chain.

Sard is here apparently celebrated for his rejection of all that is romantic. His emotional life is rigorously repressed and hidden ("He goes behind his doors and draws the chain"). Nature, here, is a malign force to be fought "bare-knuckled" and Sard's austere, empirical rationality is portrayed as a "surgeon's knife" or a corrosive acid, eliminating all fluidity ("water") and "slack false formlessness." Sard might therefore be seen to represent the quintessence of adult colonial masculinity as it expressed, for example, in Kipling's 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden," where the stoical, restrained, long-suffering "white man" is opposed to the "fluttered" and "wild" childishness and femininity of the colonized peoples. In particular, the image of the cold edged surgeon's knife in the sonnet recalls Kipling's closing lines where he likens the British judgement of their American peers to a "cold edged" blade:

Comes now, to search your manhood
Through all the thankless years,
Cold-edged with dear-bought wisdom,
The judgment of your peers!

Significantly, all of the "adult" strengths for which Sard is praised in the sonnet will prove inadequate in tackling the challenges with which he is presented. The name of Sard's ship, the Pathfinder is ominously echoed in the warning words of Ennobio, the Kingsborough's manservant, as he sets off across the Sierra to try to regain her:

"In fact, it is no path, but what is opposite to path" (117).

In no time at all, Sard has been stripped of his identity. As he reflects when he is caught by the train hands after missing his connection:

He realized that he was not now Sard Harker, the mate of a crack ship, but a ragged-looking rough-neck, dirty and unshaven (167).

The clear, "surgical" rationality of his speech proves redundant and even somewhat ridiculous in the face of the linguistic babel which he finds in Santa Barbara. Sard himself defines the name "Harker" as meaning "one who listens" (142), but that which the

protagonist hears grows increasingly difficult to understand or process as the novel progresses. The dialogue quoted below, which takes place on Sard's first visit to Los Xicales, is a case in point:

> "Yes, sir."
> "Is she at the house now?"
> "Yes, sir."
> "What is her name, do you know?"
> "Yes, sir."
> "What is her name?"
> "What is her name?"
> "Yes," Sard said, "what is her name?"
> "What name?"
> "The name she is called by: her surname."
> "Whose name?"
> "The lady's name."
> "Which name? There's so many names."
> "The name of the Spanish lady who came to this house to-day."
> "Oh," the man said, "the name of the Spanish lady who came to this house to-day?"
> "Yes, that is what I need to know; what is her name?"
> "Yes, sir," the negro said; "now I know what you want. I didn't know for the first moment what you asked me about but now I know. Oh, yes, sir. Look, sir, I'm making a basket:
>
> Put the withy there,
> Cross the withy there,
> Jesus in the air …
>
> Sir, forgive my asking, but have you a little bit of tobacco or a goddam cigarette?"
> "No", Sard said, "I have not.…"
>
> "There is no lady here, sir; the lady died a hundred years ago. Oh, say, the lovely yellow candles, and the priest he go Do diddy diddy oh do."
> "Then there is no lady?"
> "All put into the grave: ring a bell: Do" (15-16).

Sard's interlocutor parrots his questions, creating a hollow illusion of successful communication and understanding. The increasing specificity of his questions ("her name" / "the lady's name" / "her surname" / "the name of the Spanish lady who came to this house to-day") suggests a process of logical abstraction, a movement towards truth and understanding, which is made ridiculous by the servant's sudden switch back to the general ("there's so many names"), his abrupt change of subject (" a goddam cigarette") and his shift from words to meaningless sounds ("Do diddy oh do").

When Sard moves from the human world into the wilderness, the failure of language and reason is yet more absolute. The landscape in the wilderness is utterly unfamiliar and inhuman as we can see from the following passage, where the use of non-verbal sounds ("Ohoy!") to convey terrifying, inhuman otherness bears a striking resemblance to Forster's description of the haunting, inhuman echo in the Marabar Caves episode in *A Passage to India*, published in the same year:

> Now as he drew near the mouth, he heard far up the canyon something like a voice, which was not a voice, crying in the heart of the rocks. It was a strange, metallic cry of "Ohoy!" The echoes repeated it… Sard's mind offered many suggestions, one after another. Now it was like some great bell, but it was not a bell. Now it was like some ringing true blow struck by a gigantic tuning-fork, or like the blow of an axe upon a gong, or like the drilling of some gigantic woodpecker into a musical wood. He could not think what it was. It was not sorrowful nor joyful not terrible. It was great and strange. It came from the heart of the wilderness of rock, miles from any human dwelling. It was like the rock speaking. Into his mind there came again those words which he had read or heard, "The Indians do not go into the Sierra, nobody goes into the Sierra; there are strange things in the Sierra which do not want to be known."
> He asked himself whether he were not delirious and imagining the noise. But it rang clearly and made an echo (211-2).

Early in the novel we learn that this tough, seafaring persona has been assumed in response to a situation of loss and exile, which has something in common with that suffered by Masefield himself. Sard's childhood was suddenly blighted at the age of thirteen by his father's death, and he went to sea in his mid-teens following his mother's remarriage. Interestingly, the one detail we learn about Sard's father is that he was the author of a pamphlet on "Medieval Mystical Romances":

> Chisholm Harker, rector of Windlesham, in Berkshire, wrote a pamphlet on English Medieval Mystical Romances, and died young, leaving a widow and one son, Chisholm, the "Sard" Harker of these pages, who was thirteen at his father's death.
> Mrs. Harker married again two years later. Sard, at his own request, went to sea (5).

Although from one point of view this concern with "mystical romance" appears to be a sign of a certain fecklessness and inadequacy on the part of the Sard's father, whose unworldliness meant that he did not provide sufficiently for his young family, from another it offers us a key to understanding Sard's own journey and his ultimate redemption. Firstly, Sard's quest for Margarita has parallels with Dante's mystical quest for Beatrice in the *Commedia*, which Masefield read and reread avidly throughout the 1920s (Babington-Smith 1978, 196). Like Dante, Sard has his life-altering first encounter with Juanita during childhood and journeys back to her at a crisis point in his middle age.

Then, throughout the novel, Juanita is referred to by her middle name Margarita, which her brother translates with the English pearl. The feminine ideal at the heart of Sard's quest thus comes to be tied in with the parable of the "pearl of great price" and with the extensive medieval tradition of *Marguerite* literature, going back to the *Dits* of Machaut and Froissart, Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*, the alliterative Pearl and Usk's *Testament of Love* (see Spencer 2007).

Sard is drawn back to his true love through a series of prophetic visions, the supernatural authority of which is confirmed through the events of the book, despite his initial scepticism. The authority of dreams was another recurrent concern in medieval romance, due to the enormous influence of Macrobius' *De Somnium Scipionis*, which was directly cited by Chaucer at the beginning of *The Parliament of Fowls*. In his commentary on the dream of Scipio in the sixth book of Cicero's *De Republica*, Macrobius differentiates between dreams which are authentically prophetic (the *visio*, the

oraculum or the *somnium*) and those which have more physiological causes (the *visum* and the *insomnium*) (see Spearing 1976 and Stahl 1990). In his increasingly feverish state, Sard himself often speculates on the credibility of his own dreams. For example, near the end of his journey, Sard finds himself guided by the female personification of the spirit of the Pathfinder. Such feminine allegorisations are a staple of medieval romance, and Sard follows the tradition is speculating on whether the origins of his dream are supernatural or psychological:

> He was aware in his sleep that someone stood upon that ledge and told him to come on. He sat up, looked at this figure and knew that it was only partly human. In his dream, or fever, it seemed like the spirit of the Pathfinder, fierce, hard, and of great beauty. He told himself, "This is all nonsense. The Pathfinder is a ship, she has not even a figurehead, but a fiddle-head; this is a woman."
> But the figure said, "I am the Pathfinder. I can find a path for you" (243).

Finally, that a number of these prophetic dreams take place in ruined chapels and temples calls to mind the Arthurian quest for the Holy Grail, as does the travesty of the Eucharist performed by Sagrado B as he prepares to sacrifice Sard and Margarita.

Sard's anachronistic mystical quest for this childhood ideal contributes indirectly to the ruin of his core "adult" points of reference – to the wreck of the Pathfinder, the ship where he is pursuing his adult career, and the death of his mentor, Captain Carey (whose name is curiously redolent of that of Captain Currie of *The Wanderer*). The sudden arrival of salvation in the form of Don Manuel at the end of a book which has been so overwhelmingly bleak seems rather abrupt and incredible. Furthermore, Masefield's other two Santa Barbara novels, the prequel and sequel to Sard Harker entitled *ODTAA* (standing for "One Damned Thing After Another") and *The Taking of the Gry* suggest that such moments of joy and victory are at best fleeting. *ODTAA* is another quest narrative but it has none of the supernatural elements in Sard Harker and none of that novel's preoccupation with dream-like states. It is a thoroughly bleak story of the young and idealistic Highworth Ridden's doomed quest to save Carlotta. The *Taking of the Gry* is set after the death of Don Manuel, and we find that Santa Barbara has again fallen into civil war and political chaos.

It would appear, then, that redemption in *Sard Harker* is only to be found in the long-lost past – in looking back to lost childhood or to an idealized vision of the Middle Ages. However, there is one other element in the novel which seems to override its prevailing sense of mutability and decay: namely, that of art. The power of art to bear a lasting testimony to the nobility of "defeated things" (to quote the closing lines of Masefield's 1914 sonnet on "The Wanderer") is a recurrent theme throughout the novel. Sard (5), Don Manuel (4) and the Pathfinder (6-7) are all introduced through quotations from sonnets written in their honour. Shortly after learning of Cary's death and the wreck of the Pathfinder, Sard is moved and comforted to discover a monument to the captain and to his earlier ship, *The Venturer*, in which he first rescued Don Manuel:

> Sard recognized her instantly as *The Venturer*. On each side of the supporting bronze was a medallion portrait of Captain Cary, with an inscription in Spanish, which Sard translated thus:
>
> In eternal gratitude

> To Captain John Craig Caru
> And the officers and company
> Of the English barque Venturer,
> For their nobleness to the ruined in the Noche Triste"
>
> Under the inscription was a list of the Venturer's company, divided into watches, just as it had been in that long-ago time. The list ended with the boys of his own watch: "Adam Bolter, Charles Crayford, Edward Grant, Chisholm Harker." Under his own name were two lines of verse;
>
> "They gave their safety, shelter, friendship, bread,
> To me who had a price upon my head."
> Sard was overwhelmed. "So," he thought, "Here is Captain Cary's monument" (258-9)

In describing the intricate model of the ship Sard admires the attention to technical detail, commenting that this testimony must come from someone who (rather like Masefield himself) had known and loved the vessel firsthand:

> Little special matters, cush as the make of the truss of the fore-yard, the lead of the braces, the design stencilled on the deckhouse, the use of brass pins in the poop siderails, all showed that one of the old Venturers had been engaged in the work (259).

Again, when he encounters the statue and theatre dedicated to Aunt Jennings, who he recalls as "a most notorious bawd," Sard reflects on the transcendent, purifying power of art:

> All that was evil in her and dropped from her, like rags of lice, leaving only something noble… Now her memory was kept alive in that place as one whose fineness alone counted; the rest was rightly forgotten. She had come from Bermondsey and had been a bawd; now there were marble busts of her and a theatre named after her in a capital city (261).

The city of Santa Barbara itself is plainly far from idyllic from a political point of view. Masefield implies that it has earned its title as "New Jerusalem" above all as a centre for the arts:

> When the new cathedral was built upon the site of the old, men remembered this rhyme, and pled that it should be recarven:
>
> Lopez found me brick and left me stone,
> Manuel made me like an angel's throne.
>
> For indeed Don Manuel, in his rebuilding of the city, made the cathedral the marvel of the New World. That and the chapel of Carlotta at his palace, were the chief works of his own mind; but in truth he made Santa Barbara as eminent for the arts and sciences as for religion. He founded, built and endowed four big universities, three opera-houses, nineteen theatres. He discovered, encouraged, helped, and at last employed through the years of their power, all the architects, sculptors, painters,

> musicians and poets who have made Santa Barbara the glory of Spanish-speaking America (4).

In *Sard Harker*, literature and art are, to borrow Jacqueline Rose's analysis of Alan Garner,

> the repository of a privileged experience and sensibility at risk in the outside world where these values are being crushed under the weight of cultural decay (Rose 1984: 43).

4. *THE MIDNIGHT FOLK*

In this second Harker novel, a shift in genre and reading public – from the adult novel to the children's book – is coupled with a shift in time and location. We move from the "New World" – from the hellish alienation of Masefield's Central America and the fragile, transient artificial Utopia of the Dictator's Santa Barbara – back to Ledbury, a literary representation of the Herefordshire of Masefield's childhood. Sard Harker is set in 1897, on the very cusp of the twentieth century, and is a novel replete with a sense of inexorable change and of the erosion of a nostalgically remembered past. We are given no dates for *The Midnight* Folk, but it appears to be set during the period of Masefield's own late Victorian childhood. Although the First World War is an unmentioned yet ever-present spectre throughout the novel, *The Midnight Folk* nonetheless lacks *Sard Harker*'s bleak sense of looming modernity.

Kay, like Sard, is a Harker – "one who listens" (Masefield 1963, 142) – and this novel overflows with different kinds of language to an even greater extent than its predecessor. To quote Maslen (2016):

> The book is interested in everything – all trades, all crafts, all modes of speech – and has little patience for class hierarchies, except insofar as these affect the language and behaviour of the astonishingly varied cast of people and animals that populate its pages. The story it tells is delivered through a range of different voices, from songs – the book is full of fine lyrics, as one would expect from a future poet laureate – to spoken utterances in different dialects: Sir Piney Trigger's northernisms, his daughter's piratical rhetoric, Abner Brown's American English, the Rat's sibilant, slavering discourse, Roper Bilges's constant transformation of nouns into verbs – 'I'll rabbit them rabbits' – and so on. Kay gathers clues to the whereabouts of the Harker treasure from Atlases, newspaper cuttings, notes scrawled in the back of a discarded book on gunnery, scratchings on the tin door of a broken lantern – objects he gathers from many sources in the course of his adventures.

Structurally and generically, Lurie notes that:

> *The Midnight Folk* has the air of having been created episode by episode, without much advance planning – in the manner of a story told night after night to a child. All kinds of extraneous events and characters keep appearing, as if a child had requested them. The reader can almost hear him or her saying: "Put in some Indians, please. Put

> in some mermaids. And flying, and a desert island… Kay not only flies, and encounters Indians, mermaids, and pirates, he also travels in time and space, goes to sea on a model sailing ship manned by mice, and sees King Arthur and his knights (2004, 74).

As a work of continuous prose, lacking any division into chapters or parts, *The Midnight Folk* is formally a more chaotic novel than *Sard Harker*. Yet whereas in the latter novel polyphony is a distinctly post-lapsarian phenomenon and its effect is nightmarish, in the former the dream-like seamless shift from one type of language and one textual genre to another appears benign and playful. This difference results, above all, from the change of narrative perspective, which goes hand in hand with the change from adult to children's fiction and the shift in location. Whereas Sard Harker is so called because he is thought to be sardonic, Masefield's Kay takes his name from Arthurian legend. Unlike that of his "sardonic," world-weary adult predecessor, Kay's "harking" ear is innocent and adventurous.

One of the central conflicts in *The Midnight Folk* is between Kay and his governess, Silvia Daisy, a strict, church-going grammarian whose middle name "Daisy" is perhaps designed to ironically recall Sard's Margarita and who is ultimately revealed to be Mrs Pouncer, the head of Abner Brown's witches. Masefield's depiction of these exchanges can be seen to represent a fascinating reflection on language acquisition, pedagogy and the function of children's literature itself. In Foucauldian terms, Kay's lessons on grammar dramatise the moment at which the child's nascent imagination and language is subjugated to the adult "regime of truth" imposed by Silvia Daisy Pouncer with the endorsement of his guardian, Sir Theopompous. To quote Foucault:

> Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true' (1980, 38).

For Foucault, "power" is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge or "truth": to be powerful is to wield the authority of truth, to hold "the status of those who are charged with staying what counts as true." Crucially, "truth" is inextricably tied up with discourse, with language and with education – with "the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" and "the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth." The moment of language acquisition being dramatized in Kay's grammar lessons is therefore the moment of indoctrination and inculcation into the "regime." However, as Foucault repeatedly emphasizes, the fact that power and truth are constructed through language means that discourse can serve to subvert / reconstruct power as well as to reinforce it:

> Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it… We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point

> of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart' (Foucault 1980, 100-101)

Indeed, Kay's childish discourse is capable of undermining and thwarting the adult regime being imposed by his governess. The opening paragraphs of the book are a case in point:

> It had been an unhappy day for little Kay Harker. To begin with, at breakfast time the governess had received a letter from his guardian, Sir Theopompus, the chemical powder merchant, to say that he would be there for lunch, but would like lunch at 2pm, as the trains did not suit. This made the governess cross, or, as she called it, "put out." On giving the order to Jane, the cook, for a very good lunch at two o'clock, instead of one, Jane was put out, for it was her afternoon off and she did not like to be put upon. Ellen, the maid, was also put out, because if you have lunch so late, it is tea-time before you have finished washing-up. Jane and Ellen between them put the governess much further out, and then it was lesson time: Divinity, French, History, and Latin.
>
> Divinity was easy, as it was about Noah's Ark. French was fairly easy, as it was about the cats of the daughter of the gardener. History was not at all easy, as it was all about beastly Odo. He longed for Odo to come into the room, saying, "I'm Odo," so that he could jolly well shut him up with: "Well, O, don't." He got knapped on the knuckles rather tartly over history; then came Latin. That morning it was all adjectives, especially a loathsome adjective called Acer, acris, acre, sharp or piercing. It was that that put *him* out
>
> It came right at the end of lessons; that was the worst of it. As he was longing to be out of doors, he was always looking out of the window, watching the pigeons. He had to repeat acer line by line, in a sort of catechism.
>
> THE GOVERNESS: What is sharp?
> KAY: Acer.
> THE GOVERNESS: Feminine?
> KAY: Acris.
> THE GOVERNESS: Neuter?
> KAY: Acre.
> THE GOVERNESS: Now the nominative; all genders.
> KAY: Acer, acris, acre.
> THE GOVERNESS: Meaning?
> KAY: Sharp.
> THE GOVERNESS: Or? What else can it mean?
> KAY: Piercing.
> THE GOVERNESS: Accusative?
> KAY: Acrem … Acris, acre.
>
> Here the governess scowled rather, and would not say if he were right. Instead, she said: "Genitive?" But how was he to leap at the genitive when he could not tell if his taking-off point, the accusative, were sound? Besides, had it a genitive? Could you say "Of sharp?" What would be the genitive? Could it be acrae, acri, acri? That didn't sound right. What did sound right? Not quite acrorum, acrarum, acrorum.

> "Well", the governess said, "what is the genitive?"
> "Acrostic, acrostic, acrostic?"
> "What?"
> "Acrumpet, acrumpet, acrumpet." (7-9)

The tensions between adult and childish language are brought out through the use of free indirect discourse, with Kay's voice constantly emerging through that of the narrator, as we can see in the breathless, childlike syntax and logical non-sequiturs which characterize the novel as a whole. In particular, Kay's use of the phrasal verbs "put out" and "put upon" are typical of his tendency to parrot fragments of adult speech to the point of absurdity. Indeed, Silvia Daisy later complains to Kay:

> You learn a phrase and then repeat it just like a little parrot (56).

On Kay's lips, words come unstuck from their automatic conventional associations and their materiality or "thingness," and hence their susceptibility to the playful vagaries of the childish imagination, comes to the fore.

Throughout the novel, Silvia Daisy Pouncer is very much the prescriptive grammarian, seeking to shackle linguistic elements within the confines of a rigid set of norms. Kay's language, and that of *The Midnight Folk* as a whole, would require a more descriptive approach, whereby individual speech acts and texts are conditioned by the social, historical and psychological contexts of their production. For Kay words exist within a seamless and non-hierarchical network of semantic, visual and phonetic associations, whereby, in the passage quoted above, the proper name "Odo" is naturally coupled with the verb "O-don't" and the Latin "Acer" leads to the thoroughly Anglo Saxon "Acrumpet." In general, Kay is a great lover of onomatopoeic words, such as "scrunch" (75, 128), "phlumphing" (125) or "gibble-gabble" (124) and, as Derek Attridge points out with reference to Joyce, this device further serves to underline the distinction between representational language and represented reality and to celebrate literary language as an autonomous physical reality in itself:

> If onomatopoeia is to be judged in terms of the accuracy with which it enables the sounds of language to reproduce the sounds and other physical characteristics of the nonlinguistic world, then the more successful it is…, the more it is bound to come into conflict with the necessarily abstract nature of the language system, foregrounding the physical properties of speech (and writing) (Attridge 1984, 156).

The materiality of words is further highlighted through Masefield's repeated foregrounding of the textuality of the language on the page through variations in format, as we can see in our opening quotation in the shift to direct discourse, which is accompanied by a shift to play / drama format with the names of the two speakers in upper case. Similar shifts in format recur throughout the text, with indentation and changes in typeface being used to stress the materiality of various textual artefacts, such as Aston Harker's epitath (58), the label on the invisibility potion bottle (64) and the battered volume of *The Sea-Gunner's Practice,* a textual artefact which plays a pivotal role in the plot as a whole:

> *"The Sea-Gunner's Practice,"* he read to himself, *"With a Description of Captain Shotgun's Murdering Piece with the improved Breech Action for use upon Salvage Coasts; Together with Tables and Proportions for all Pieces usual to that Service, by B. Blastem, Master Gunner.* On the flyleaf, in a neat handwriting, with a clove-hitch flourish below it, was the name of the owner:
>
> Aston Harker, Seekings House, 1804.
>
> "Why," he said to himself, "it is my great-grandfather's book. How very strange!" The book had been the property of other men before it had come to Captain Harker, for other names and earlier dates were written in it. He settled to read… At the end of the book some twenty blank pages had been left by the publishers, so that sea-gunners might make notes and accounts of their stores according to the tables printed for their guidance. Captain Harker had made notes upon the first of these pages; the rest had been scrawled upon in a clumsy, coarse, untidy writing, by someone who did not know how to spell. In the cover of the book, at the end, was a pocket, which had once contained an engraving of Captain Shotgun's Murdering piece. The engraving was gone; in its stead was a very old brittle yellow piece of newspaper, headed:
>
> -EW YORK, December 1811.
>
> Strange Rescue in Gulf (78).

The Sea-Gunner's Practice is a text which can be seen to embody the notions of textuality which characterize *The Midnight Folk*. Its materiality is emphasised both typographically (-EW YORK) and in its description. Crucially, moreover, it is not one text but many, each of which differs in style, content and physical appearance. Furthermore, it is not univocal, but polyphonic. To the voice of its original author, B. Blastem, have been added those of Kay's great-grandfather, Aston Harker, of Roper Bilges and of the anonymous journalist. Ironically, the only text to be of no importance in the finding of the treasure is that which should be the most "authoritative" – the published monograph itself, which Kay describes as "stiff reading" (77) - and the text which provides the most interesting information is that written by the semi-literate criminal Roper Bilges.

Interestingly, as we will now see, this stress on the physicality of language is frequently associated with the physicality of the child Kay. Silvia Daisy's attempts to regulate Kay's language are often coupled with attempts to regulate his body, and Kay's linguistic playfulness is frequently associated with his physical senses, as we can see at the closure of the grammar lesson which opens the book, where Kay's linguistic misdemeanours are punished with a rap over the knuckles and being deprived of his supper. This coupling of linguistic and corporeal regulation can again be explained in Foucauldian terms. Another pertinent passage in this regard occurs later in the book, when Silvia Daisy refuses Kay's request to keep his slippers on during his lessons:

> "Please can't I wear my slippers during lessons?"
>
> "No, you won't wear your slippers during lessons. For one thing, they're not dry and you'll catch your death wearing them; and, for another, you'll fidget me distracted, by rubbing one slipper off and then the other, just as though you were playing a game with them."
>
> This was a cruel thrust, because Kay did play games with them. When he had scraped off a slipper, he would push it about with his toes, and imagine that it was a canoe full

> of Redskins on the warpath, going down the rapids; or a diving bell at Tobermory, bringing up treasure from one of the ships of the Armada; or Great-Grandpapa Harker's ship, the Plunderer, engaging seven French privateers; or that famous horse Lottery, at various stages of the steeplechase, the prints of which hung in the study. But the boots were laced up things that gave no solace. (42)

Imaginative and discursive freedom are here linked to physical freedom and pleasure. Kay's tightly laced up boots correspond to the imaginative and discursive restrictions to which he is being subjected by his teacher.

A similar association between linguistic and physical repression occurs over breakfast, when Sylvia Daisy's linguistic strictures are closely tied up with a threat of the withdrawal of food:

> "I was just wondering if this was a duck egg or a hen egg."
> "Use the subjunctive and the genitive," she said. "Were a duck's egg, not was a duck egg. And it's a hen's egg. Ducks' eggs are a great deal too rich." At any other time Kay would have boasted that it was a double-yolker, but refrained, thinking that this would probably lead to confiscation, as too much for a young stomach. (40)

Imaginative proliferation through language is again associated with physical voracity and abundance in the account of Kay's voyage on the model of the Plunderer, where we see recurrent, increasingly extravagant lists of foods, first in the description of the little barrels in the lifeboats and then in that of his breakfast on board:

> Then there were real lifeboats ready for use. He could see the barrels and lockers in them marked "Best Preserved Milk", "Corned Beef", "Ship's bread," "Pemmican," "Raisins," "Chocolate Cream," "Turkish Delight," "Split Peas," "Currants," "Hundreds and Thousands," "Mixed Biscuits," "Dry Ginger Beer," etc. No fear of starving in life-boats like those. (126)

> He led the way down to a passage where there were a great many doors labeled First Mate, Second Mate, Third Mate, Captain's Stores, Instrument Room, Chart Room, Steward's Pantry, Bullion Room, warranted iron-lined, Captain's Bath, Mate's Bath, Jam Room, Sardine Room, etc., as well as one big open door leading to the cabin where the table was set for breakfast. They had for breakfast all the things that Kay was fondest of: very hot, little, round loaves of new white bread baked in the embers of a wood-fire, very salt butter, a sardine with a lot of olive oil, some minced kidneys, a poached egg and frizzled bacon, a very fat sausage all bursting out of its skin, a home-made pork-pie, with cold jelly and yolk of egg beneath the crust, a bowl of strawberries and cream with sifted sugar, a bowl of raspberries and cream with blobs of sugar, candyish brown sugar that you could scrunch, some nice new mushrooms and chicken, part of a honey-comb with cream, a cup of coffee with crystals of white sugar candy for a change, a yellow plum, a greengage and then a ripe blue plum of Pershore to finish off with (128).

In this second passage especially, alliteration, repetition, assonance and onomatopoeia reinforce the connection between the linguistic / imaginative and physical voracity of the childish narrative perspective.

In light of all this, it is perhaps not over-speculative to note the womb-like quality of Kay's refuge under his bed, where he hides in both *The Midnight Folk* and *The Box of Delights* in order to read in peace without adult interference:

> After lessons that morning Kay went to his bedroom to the cool, pink secret cave made by the valance of his bed… He turned over on his stomach with a sigh of pleasure, to examine it in peace (76).

Kay's linguistic, imaginative and physical voracity can be associated with the Freudian "pleasure principle," which ranges freely and is always met with satisfaction in the womb, but enters into conflict with the "reality principle" upon birth. In general, Kay has a great penchant for secluded, private spaces and seems to be forever on the lookout for hiding places. He is delighted when he discovers Benjamin's den in his garden (141) and later on, when Kay sneaks onto the Crowmarsh estate, we learn that "He was thrilled by holes in trees" (142). Later, Kay ventures under the sea in a diving bell, another enclosed space which removes him from everyday reality. Midnight itself – the starting point for all Kay's supernatural adventures – constitutes a temporal equivalent of such spaces, since it is a moment in which the adult world is at rest ("All the world of men was asleep," 127) and the usual constrictions of reality cease to apply:

> "This is the loveliest time that I've ever had," Kay thought, "and anything may happen" (127).

This desire to retreat indefinitely from adult reality is ultimately and inevitably associated with death (Rose 1984, 66-87). The impossibility of perpetuating childhood innocence and freedom and continuing to live in the world means that allusions to death and dying are recurrent in Kay's fantasies. His love of holes in trees, for example, is narrated in connection with one of Ellen's many macabre anecdotes:

> Ellen had often told him how they had found the skeleton of a man inside a big hollow oak in Sir Hassle Gassle's wood (142).

Allusions to more or less violent death and images of decay abound in the description of the stables and Benjamin's lair:

> All through his life he had dreaded exploring that side of the garden, where the stables, that had once been Benjamin's home, stood. In some undated past a man called The Tailor had been found killed in one of the outhouses there, "stabbed right through the skull," as Ellen said," which shows you the force that must have been used.…"
>
> First was the barn, the thatch of which was green with moss and sunken into pits, which would presently be holds. Next to this was the dangerous brew-house, where cavernous old barrels stood falling asunder, as their hoops rusted through. The rotten

> floor was full of holes, through some of which you could hear the murmur of running water. Indeed, the brew-house was a terrible place, which made one remember the worst that one had ever heard of Sweeney Todd.
>
> When he entered it this afternoon, another tale came back to him, that one of his grandfather's workmen, who had worked in the brew-house, had so soaked himself with spirits that at last, as Ellen said, "he took fire and burned all blue. There was nothing left of him but some black oil on the floor" (111-2).

Again, the underwater city which Kay visits in his diving bell is a kind of ghost town, full of memories of its long-gone inhabitants:

> No one was in that city. Kay went into two of the houses; in one, the kitchen was set out with pots and pans for dinner; two eggs were in a bowl and the bone of a leg of mutton was on a dish; in the other, the beds in the nursery were turned down ready for the children, and in one of the little beds a child had set a doll, on which the little shells were growing. There were gaily painted carvings on some of the walls, showing the racing of children and romps and tugs-of-war (137)

Loss is everywhere in *The Midnight Folk*. Kay himself is an orphan. His beloved toys have been taken away from him in order to stop him dwelling on his bereavement ("They will only remind him of the past," 22) and he initially assumes that they are dead:

> "I'm afraid they are all dead," Kay said. "I wish they weren't" (22).

For a young child, Kay himself seems peculiarly fascinated by death. We learn that he has memorized all the memorial plaques at the church:

> He knew all the memorial tablets within sight by heart, from Captain Porkins, late of the 91st (Duke of Cumberland's) Light Horse, who was slain while doing staff duty at Houhomont on the Field of Waterloo, to
>
> ANNABEL BETHESDA MEE, Spinster of this Parish.
> She rests in peace till Wars and Tumults end,
> We an Example mourn, the Poor a Friend. (109)

Allusions to mortality abound once more when Kay visits his great grandfather in his portrait:

> A black cat, with white throat and paws, which had been ashes for forty years, rubbed up against great-grandpapa Harker's legs, and then, springing on the arm of his chair, watched the long dead sparrows in the plum tree which had been firewood a quarter of a century ago. (47)

The underwater passage in particular, which is replete with echoes of Shakespeare's "Full Fathom Five" lyric, presents the deathly subacquatic otherworld as strangely fertile and enticing. In the two passages which follow we see "at first" a cautious, realistic sense

of self preservation, which is followed by a growing sense of longing for dissolution into the "drowsy delight" of the breaking waves:

> At first he thought that everything there was dead; but when he had been twenty seconds in that tingling water he knew that it was full of life. The white sand of the sea-floor was alive with tiny, scurrying, glittering creatures, little beings looked at him from the branches of the coral, flowers poked out eyes at him upon stalks like snails' horns, he could see the leaves of the seaweeds shine with joy at every good suck-in of light. All these living forms were swaying gently as the swell lifted and fell: all were glistening and tingling with joy; a kind of drowsy song of delight moved through the water, everything was singing, or murmuring, or sighing because life was so good (131).

> At first, Kay was frightened of the waves as they curled and toppled high over his head. Very soon he was wading to meet them, so that they could break all over him or carry him in to the sands." (136)

Of course, as Maslen observes, the sense of loss, death and yearning for lost innocence which pervades *The Midnight Folk* is also traceable to the fact that, despite its late Victorian setting, this is very much a post-war novel:

> It's largely populated by women, children and animals, and many of the men in it are ghosts, afflicted by a profound melancholy brought on by their part in a calamitous loss (Maslen 2016).

Maslen goes on to point out how Kay's lost toys – the "guardians" – trudging exhausted through the mud in search of the treasure recall the generation of young men lost during the First World War:

> Indeed, as he spoke, the four exhausted men sat down on a heap of stones by the road, one of them seemed to fall asleep at once. The other three were dazed stupid with tiredness and nodded forward as they say… They were sopping wet. They looked so utterly miserable and discouraged, that it was plain that they had found nothing (205-6).

Like *Sard Harker*, *The Midnight Folk* is a mystical quest narrative, heavily tinged with medievalism. Kay takes his name from Arthurian tradition, Sir Kay the Seneschal being the brother of King Arthur in some versions of the legend. Towards the end of the novel Kay even pays a visit to Arthur's court (177-9). The idea of a quest is implied in the very name of Kay's house, Seekings House, which calls to mind Masefield's 1913 poem "The Seekers," which is narrated by mysterious figures who are engaged in an eternal, hopeless quest for "the City of God":

> Friends and loves we have none, nor wealth nor blessed abode,
> But the hope of the City of God at the other end of the road.
> Not for us are content, and quiet, and peace of mind,
> For we go seeking a city that we shall never find (Masefield 1930, 68).

This early lyric calls to mind both Don Manuel's "New Jerusalem" in Santa Barbara and the lost "golden city" which Kay finds under the sea.

The ostensible object of Kay's quest is the lost Harker treasure. Yet the treasure is an object whose meanings multiply throughout the novel. It signifies a story-book adventure and "delight" to the young Kay, shame and hope for redemption to his grandfather, material wealth to Abner Brown and the witches, and also to Kay's guardian Sir Theopompous, paradisiac beauty and goodness to the mermaids who swim amongst the "golden people" in the shipwreck and worthless "Sin-and-heathen-idols" (158) to Old Man John the Farmer. Its location and history is the subject of multiple divergent narratives throughout the novel, and it is the subject of multiple, simultaneous quests by very different treasure hunters. At one stage, there is even a doubt as to which treasure we are looking for, when Kay is sent off in search of the treasure of Benjamin the Highwayman (111).

Aside from the recovery and restitution of the treasure, which is described rather briefly, the true "happy ending" of Kay's quest lies in his recovery of his long-lost toys, "the guardians" and the arrival of a new mother figure, Caroline Louisa, to be his guardian. It is surely no coincidence that Caroline Louisa shares her first name with Masefield's own mother. Once again, the novel's quest ultimately carries us back to an idealized, lost childhood. *Sard Harker* is a novel of exile, in which we find an adult cut adrift in a vast landscape where words and meanings and conscious perception become terrifyingly unstable. The young hero of *The Midnight Folk* rarely leaves his own home, yet the landscape of the novel feels vast because of the proliferation of language, signification and imaginative landscapes. The dreamlike narrative of the book and its polyphonic quality bear none of the nightmarish quality of the earlier novel precisely because of the childish vision of the narrative filter. Yet the elegiac quality of the novel as a whole and its recurring preoccupation with death and loss never allows us to forget the transience and impossibility of this central ideal.

5. *THE BOX OF DELIGHTS*

Sard Harker is set at the end of the age of tall ships and the end of the nineteenth century. *The Midnight Folk* is set in a lost past and evokes a pervasive sense of elegiac nostalgia and loss. *The Box of Delights*, instead, is set in Masefield's present day at Christmas time – a moment of the ecclesiastical calendar associated with salvation and new birth.

The novel's Christmas setting places its story of loss and redemption at once inside and outside of historical time. The specific modern events of Kay's struggle and victory against Abner Brown's "Wolves" typologically recalls the perennial struggle between good and evil, the eternal movement from loss to rebirth. *The Box of Delights* conveys a sense of historical continuity and symmetry which appears to be irrevocably lost in the two earlier books of the trilogy. Kay is aided in his quest by Cole Hawlings, a mysterious figure who has been around since "the dark ages" and two other pre-Christian nature spirits, Herne the Hunter and the Lady of the Oak Tree. The wolves who Kay sees fighting the ancient Britons at King Arthur's camp are somehow the same as the modern wolves, Abner Brown and company. When Herne the Hunter takes Kay hunting in the

wild wood, he finds a timeless world, full at once with dangers and wonders (Masefield 2008, 86-7) With its medieval cathedral and its Arthurian landmarks, the landscape of *The Box of Delights* (again modelled on the Herefordshire of Masefield's childhood) is steeped in history, yet this novel conveys none of the earlier works' dread of modernity. Around the Christmas tree at the bishop of Tatchester's palace, we find Meccano, flying aeroplanes and electric trainsets as well as dolls and teddy bears. Kay enthuses about the electric lights:

> The lesser boughs were filled lit with countless coloured electric lights like tropical fruits: ever so much better, Kay thought, than those coloured candles that drip wax everywhere and so often set fire to the tree and to the presents (112).

In this novel, Kay has passed from being a seeker to being a guardian and a rescuer. The "box of delights" is entrusted to him at the beginning of the novel by Cole Hawlings, a travelling puppeteer and showman. In an attempt to steal the box, Cole is soon "scrobbled" by Abner Brown's gang, together with the bishop and most of the staff of the cathedral, Caroline Louisa and two of the four Jones children who are spending Christmas with Kay at Seekings House. Curiously, the four Jones children appear share the names of some of Kay's lost toys from *The Midnight Folk*, Peter, Jemima, Susan and Maria (Masefield 1963, 229). Caroline Louisa, who appears as an elfin figure, riding a flying black horse in *The Midnight Folk* has also become a much more recognizably human, down-to-earth mother figure in *The Box of Delights*. In other words, at the beginning of *The Box of Delights*, Kay has the mother and the young companions for whom he so desperately years in *The Midnight Folk*. That this innocent, happy boy is asked to rescue the ageing showman is significant. Cole Hawlings seems to have something in common with the eponymous *King Cole* of Masefield's 1921 dramatic poem. The poem tells us that King Cole lived in some unspecified Golden Age "before the troubles came" (Masefield 1921, 1) who was "so well beloved" that after his death he was allowed "to wander earth, a friend of man" (14) in the guise of "an old, poor, wandering man, with glittering eyes" (16) (Cole is initially described as "a little old man in a worn grey overcoat" with "very bright eyes" (Masefield 2008, 4). King Cole's redemptive power is, crucially, artistic. Befriending a circus fallen on hard times, he plays his pipe as they parade before the land's depressed young prince and their performance is infused with enchantment and magic. Cole, then, as a magician and puppeteer, can be seen as a figure for the artist himself. Yet this artist, perhaps like Masefield himself in the face of a world and a literary culture changed beyond all recognition, has fallen into difficulty and requires the innocence and imagination of a child to save him (Lurie 2004, 78).

As for the "box of delights" itself, it is able to make its bearer "go small", in order to listen in on conversations to which they might not otherwise be party or "go swift", covering impossible distances in a short period of time – very much the qualities of fictional narrative. When Kay looks inside the box he finds fairies, pirates, knights, a desert island and Herne's primeval forest. The box of delights is clearly also a book of delights – a figure for the transformative and redemptive powers of literature itself.

In contrast to the chapterless form of *The Midnight Folk*, *The Box of Delights* is clearly divided and framed. Each chapter is headed by a rhyming couplet and the couplets can be put together to form a complete poem. Each chapter opens and closes with an

engraving by Masefield's daughter, Judith. We are never allowed to forget that the story is part of a carefully crafted artefact. The fact that Kay awakens at the end of the novel and realizes all the book's events have been a dream, although rather disappointing from a narrative point of view, can again be seen as a conscious framing device. The dream frame again focuses the artificiality of the story (Puck's famous address at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* springs to mind). Four years before the onset of another devastating World War, with the political landscape darkening and the "wolves running" once again, the novel is an extraordinary expression of faith in the power of literature.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The Harker novels, then, are not so much a narrative trilogy as an ongoing reflection on the themes of childhood, loss and artistic creation. The lack of any chronological coherence between the texts, despite the numerous and tantalizing echoes and connections which seem to invite us to read them in connection with each other, ultimately serves to foreground the artificiality of the novels: their status as texts, created at different moments of their author's career. Beginning the sequence with an overriding sense of nostalgia, loss and foreboding, Masefield eventually finds a source of enduring hope and joy in the animated and invigorating gaze of the child and the transformative and transhistorical power of art.

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