



The *Philippa Pearce* *Memorial Lecture*

celebrating excellence in writing for children

Both Perhaps Present

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.

T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets: Burnt Norton*

I quote those words at the beginning for the sake of their relevance to what I'm going to be talking about this evening in the context of *Tom's Midnight Garden*, because if we had to say in one word what that novel was about, there's little doubt that the answer would be 'time'. The book is a wonderfully wrought story, but it's more than that, though a good story is quite enough for anything to be; it's a lens through which we can see something more clearly, and the something in this case is that mysterious thing called time. The grandfather clock that strikes thirteen when it should strike midnight undoes our normal time, the time of wakefulness and the business of daily life, and allows us an hour of a different time from somewhere, or somewhen, else. It does this through the person of Tom, who experiences these different times, and through the calm, kindly voice of the narrator who tells us about him.

I read the book when I was young, and fell under its spell as so many did, though I didn't remember it very accurately. When I was young I thought the daily life of Tom's own time was itself a long time ago, because of one or two little things that stuck in my mind: the dreadfully serious way all the adults took measles, as if it were some deadly miasma before which medical science fled with its hands in the air. Tom's age isn't given, but to go by the date of publication, if he was a contemporary boy he must be more or less exactly my own age, living in my own time; and I'd had measles, and no fuss was made at all. But they obviously made a fuss in the old days, I thought. And there was the way people spoke. At one point Tom asks Aunt Gwen about the flowers she put in his bedroom: "Had you to buy them?" he says. Elsewhere he also says "I wish I hadn't to go home tomorrow." I registered those things with interest, as ways people must have spoken long ago. I certainly never heard anyone use either of those locutions when I was growing up.

So it was already a book set in the past, before the garden comes into the story with its even-further-back layers of time. Reading it recently I saw that I must have been wrong about that, and Philippa Pearce in the 1950s was writing a contemporary story, though there were things about it that made it feel old-fashioned, as if the author herself were a little old-fashioned, a little more attached to and aware of the past than some other writers. I also saw a little more of how she was doing what she did, and therefore I found more to admire.

A quite extraordinary number of novels published these days, for adults as well as for children, use the present tense. I recently listened to a presentation by creative writing students at a certain university, and they had all written a novel or part of one, and by far the majority had written in the present tense. [When I asked their tutor why he thought they'd done this, he had to admit he hadn't even noticed]. Fiction editors have told me that a large number of the books they receive from literary agents are told in the present tense, a good number of those in the first person as well. It's certainly true of the books they send me asking for a puff.

Something has happened to our understanding of fiction, or of the past, or something, to make the present tense the way in which young people, and adults as well, want to talk about something that can only be in the past, namely the events about which they're writing. It might be the influence of TV and film drama: drama, of course, happens now rather than then, and the present is the only appropriate tense for stage directions. It might be that, but in that case the turn to the present tense would have happened a lot earlier; this has been going on for about fifteen years, as far as I can see. In the 1950s, when Philippa Pearce wrote *Tom's Midnight Garden* in the past tense that was conventional then, it was quite uncommon to use the present tense, though some writers had chosen to do so for perfectly good reasons. Dickens had done so, in parts of *Bleak House* and elsewhere. I've done so myself, though rarely. But now it's all over the place.

Nor is it only fiction where the present tense is rearing its head. A recent article in *Prospect* magazine, by Sam Leith, drew attention to the large number of works of non-fiction, memoirs and the like, which now use the present tense. It's also felt to be compulsory in those Radio 4 programmes like *In Our Time* and *The Long View*, which examine historical events or characters. Almost always the speakers fall into the present tense:

"Over the eighteenth century the economy's growing, population is becoming a more and more pressing concern, by the end of the century it's almost doubled in size ..."

"Wycliffe has contact with people in government, he's not an isolated figure. He begins to seem useful to John of Gaunt around 1371 ..."

And so on. Those quotations were from *In Our Time* programmes about Malthusianism and the Lollards respectively. I went to the *In Our Time* website, chose the programmes at random and stopped the recordings at random, and there we were. Anyone who listens to those programmes will recognise the tone.

It doesn't stop there. I recently had to read a number of submissions by architects in a competition for a new college building. I quote from a passage describing the background of the site:

In 1675, Somerset Hall is still surrounded by orchards and wooded fields. In 1713 it becomes Gloucester College and buys its site from St Edward's College. In 1744 the college expands again to the south and west, up to its present boundary.

[Names have been changed to protect the innocent].

I make this point about the present tense to emphasise the contrast between what we often get now, the immediate, the up-close, the hectic of the incessant present tense, and what I might call the classical style of Pearce's writing, which has a great deal to do with how the narrator does her work. There's a coolness, a judicious calm about the way the story is told — a tone which more and more now seems itself to be old-fashioned, quite apart from the medical anxieties about measles and the way people speak. I like that classical tone very much, I admire it when I see it, I try to achieve it in my own work; and one of the aspects of that 'classical' tone is the voice of the narrator.

The technical term for the way she tells the story [and I'll come back to that 'she' in a minute] is free indirect style. This means that it's told from a point of view that takes in both what is happening and a particular character's thoughts and feelings about it. It seems to many readers a perfectly natural way of writing, but it hasn't had a very long history in comparison with the length of time people have been telling each other stories. Jane Austen is often put forward as the first consistent user of this point of view in English fiction: we're told what happens in *Emma* the book and also what Emma Woodhouse the character thinks about it.

The viewpoint isn't entirely limited to Emma's, though. The narrator can express a different point of view with great clarity. The voice that tells the story tells us more about Emma than she would necessarily like us to know:

The real evils, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself.

This tart assessment of the young lady changes with the most natural air in the world into a view of Emma's own thoughts and feelings:

He had misinterpreted the feelings which had kept her face averted, and her tongue motionless. They were combined only of anger against herself, mortification, and deep concern. She had not been able to speak; and, on reaching the carriage sunk back for a moment overcome — then reproaching herself for having taken no leave, making no acknowledgement, parting in apparent sullenness.

It's such a swift and supple method of telling a story that most of us probably don't notice the way the point of view darts from one spot to another. We see the same process at work in *Tom's Midnight Garden*. Here's the voice from outside Tom:

Yes, you could hear it striking, very distinctly; you could count the strokes. Tom counted them, and smiled condescendingly: the clock was wrong again in its striking — senselessly wrong.

I don't think we'd find Tom using the word *condescendingly* about himself, even if he knew it. The narrator is making a judgement about him. This view from outside knows the world and how it works:

The Kitsons were better off than the Longs — there is all the difference, in expense, between having two children and having none at all.

Very occasionally we find ourselves neither in Tom's thoughts nor watching him from outside. Half a dozen or so times in the novel, the narrator finds herself needing to tell us something that was going on elsewhere:

Alan Kitson would have been disappointed if he had seen Mrs Bartholomew. She was lying tranquilly in bed: her false teeth, in a glass of water by the bedside, grinned unpleasantly in the moonlight, but her indrawn mouth was curved in a smile of easy, sweet-dreaming sleep. She was dreaming of the scenes of her childhood.

And here's Tom and Peter's mother, looking at Peter asleep:

Once he smiled, and then sighed; and once such a far-away look came into his face that his mother bent over him in an impulse to wake him and recall him to her. She restrained herself, and left him.

But for most of the time we, the readers, are with Tom — in fact, we're inside his head. We share so much of his awareness that an interesting little point in this passage, for example, doesn't snag at our attention in the least:

His thoughts ran on the garden, as they always did nowadays. He reflected how dangerously near he had been to betraying it, just now.

Whose *nowadays* is it? Whose *now*? A pedant would no doubt say that the sentences should read:

His thoughts ran on the garden, as they always did at that stage. He reflected how dangerously near he had been to betraying it, just then.

After all, it's Tom's time we're reading about, not ours; *now* and *nowadays* belong to us, in our time, not his.

But that's not quite right either, because is it our time, in 2011, or the narrator's time, in 1958? Surely the word nowadays should really be referring to her time, not his, and not ours either.

But of course we don't read like that. We've drawn so close to Tom in the preceding part of the story that his time has become our time, at least for the time we spend reading the book. We're with him so closely that we share his thoughts, and his reflections are partly ours, and his now and nowadays are ours too.

And this is where it gets really interesting, because [as I said about *Emma* the book] if it's done well we hardly notice the moments when the point of view shifts from outside Tom to inside Tom, from Tom then to Tom now, from Tom him to Tom us. If we're not looking for it we don't notice it at all. The movement is performed so swiftly and lightly that it seems the most natural thing in the world, even though really it's a complicated psychological manoeuvre.

But who's making this manoeuvre?

Well, Philippa Pearce, of course, says Mr Common Sense, the Reader Who Will Not Be Fooled. But Mr Common Sense is deeply fooled if he thinks that. A moment ago I spoke about the narrator, and used a possessive pronoun to speak of the time in which something happened: *her* time, I said. Mr Common Sense was perfectly happy with that, because he thought I was referring to the author. But I wasn't. I was referring to the narrator, and I might just as correctly have said *his* time. [Why shouldn't the disembodied voice of the narrator be male?] In fact I said *her* because I also had a *his* in the sentence, meaning Tom's, and I wanted to distinguish between them. "Her time, not his, and not ours either," was what I said.

But isn't the author the narrator? says Mr Common Sense, on the verge of being outraged.

No, is the answer. The narrator is a character invented by the author, just as much as Tom is, and Hatty is, and Uncle Alan and Aunt Gwen are, just as much as Mr Woodhouse and Emma and Mr Knightley and Miss Bates and every other character in a novel. The narrator is a very unusual character, mind you, only manifest as that disembodied voice. I believe that the narrator is not actually a human character at all, and his or her relationship to time, which is the theme of this talk, is one of the ways in which his or her uncanny inhumanness is manifest.

Think what the narrator can do. He or she can flit between one mind and another, as we've seen. Human beings can't do that. He or she can dart backwards and forwards along the stream of time like a kingfisher. My favourite example of this kind of narration, the so-called omniscient sort, is the famous chapter in *Vanity Fair* about the panic in Brussels during the Battle of Waterloo. The narrator speeds over all the extent of the panorama, focusing now on this detail, now on that, sometimes looking a little ahead to the days after the battle and sometimes looking a little back to the days just before, and then looking both backwards and forwards along a whole length of time ["Jos seldom spent a half-hour in his life which cost him so much money."] At one point the narrator looks back months and years to the childhood of poor little Tom Stubble, the wounded ensign carried back in the cart, as he dreams of it in his delirium, and at another looks a long way ahead to a time, centuries hence, when "Frenchmen and Englishmen might be boasting and killing each other still, carrying out bravely the Devil's code of honour."

And finally in the wonderful last paragraph taking in the panorama of the whole landscape, and then focusing closely on two of the main characters, one knowing nothing of the other, the other capable of knowing nothing about anyone any more:

No more firing was heard at Brussels — the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and the city; and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart.”

This capacity of the narrator to move from here to there with the speed of thought, to see a whole panorama in one glance and then to fly down like a dragonfly and land with utter precision on the most important detail, to look ahead in time as well as to look behind, is one of the most extraordinary things we human beings have ever invented. We take it for granted, and I think we should applaud it a little more. I don't know if it makes anyone else rub their eyes in wonder, but it certainly makes me do so; and every time I read a book where the author is so miraculously in control of this ghostly being, the narrator, this voice so like a human's but so uncanny in its knowledge and so swift and sprite-like in its movement, I feel a delight in possibility and mystery and make-believe.

[A little side-note: a moment ago I referred to “the so-called omniscient” narration, or narrator. We often hear it referred to as omniscient, but that isn't a very accurate name for it, because to demonstrate the narrator's omniscience we would need a text that did literally speak about everything, and that would take longer than the universe has been in existence. We haven't got time for that. The narrator clearly knows many things, though, and should really be called *multiscient* — a perfectly respectable word. I was curious to see whether my favourite dictionary had taken note of this, so I opened it: Chambers's revised edition of 1959, now much battered and mended, a handy size, and full of those little explosions of mischief among the definitions that delight all Chambers devotees. And there it was, in the form of *multiscience*: knowledge of many things. Wondering if the word was still current, I opened my latest Chambers, the 10th edition of 2006, the approximate dimensions of a microwave oven, and found that it had gone. On the way to it, though, I found this definition of *mullet*, which I recommend to you: a hairstyle that is short at the front, long at the back, and ridiculous all round.]

I want to look briefly at two other forms of narration, both familiar in different settings. One is the first-person way of telling a story:

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born [as I have been informed and believe] on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.

The opening of *David Copperfield*. There are many advantages of telling a story like this. It seems natural: the witness to events is telling us about them directly. It's long-established: Daniel Defoe, sometimes referred to as the founder of the English novel, used it for *Robinson Crusoe*. It's still highly popular; one of its most comfortable forms of expression is the thriller, but it is flexible enough to serve the most literary of texts: “For a long time I used to go to bed early ...” It still satisfies readers, and more than satisfies: I heard of one American reader, the friend of a friend, a highly educated man, who refuses to read any fiction that is not

written in the first person, on the grounds that he doesn't know where it's coming from, who's telling the story: he just can't trust any voice that isn't attached to a name.

There are disadvantages to the first-person method too. I've rarely used it myself, because I can't help asking why should this character who's telling this story sound so like me? Because he or she inevitably would, no matter how hard I tried. And there's the matter of plausibility. I have put down unfinished more children's novels than I could count because they purport to be told by a child or a teenager, and yet their main characteristic is a slick mastery of tone and structure that can only come from a practised adult with an eye on the marketplace. You have to be plausible about what knowledge is available to your narrator, too. Conan Doyle solved that problem by making Dr Watson a bit slower and simpler than Sherlock Holmes, and as much in the dark as the reader is, until Holmes reveals exactly how the unfortunate Miss Stoner met her ghastly death — or whatever.

Could *Tom's Midnight Garden* work as a first-person narrative? Only with a great deal of strain. Tom himself is too young to make a plausible narrator — too young as he is in the book, anyway. You could have a grown-up Tom reflecting on this extraordinary passage from his childhood, that would be plausible enough, but why bother, unless the real theme of that book were his adult life? But that would be a different story. *This* is the story: the story is not Tom thinking about it later.

Hatty could possibly do it, but that would mean breaking the story in two — the first part to tell about the strange ghost-like boy who haunts her childhood, and the second to tell of their meeting again after so many years. And that would mean losing the magic of Tom's encounters with the garden, which we encounter with him in that wonderful slow-developing way, which works as well as it does because of the frustration and unhappiness before it, which we also encounter with him through the free indirect method that Pearce uses. So it would be no good asking Hatty to tell the story either. Furthermore, there are those little glimpses of other people elsewhere that wouldn't be available either to Tom or to Hatty. The story we have is told the only way — well, no: the best way it could be told.

The other form of narration I want to consider is what we get in fairy tales. I mean fairy tales of the Grimm variety, not the Andersen.

“Once there was a miller who had a beautiful daughter ...”

“Once there was a king who had three sons ...”

“There were once two brothers, one rich and the other poor ...”

Once upon a time, in fact. A long time ago, not now. Nothing is particular, everything is general; often the characters don't even have names — they are the youngest son, the princess, the tailor. They have no interior lives. They are allowed the strongest and most elementary passions — love, fear, lust for vengeance, loyalty; but they don't reflect on these feelings, and neither does the storyteller. There is no psychology in fairy tales. Neither is there any description of the sort that a novelist would take care about and pride in: princesses are beautiful, and that's that; forests are dark; witches are old; mountains are high. Of literary style there is not a smidgeon, because these are not literary works, they're oral ones. It doesn't matter precisely what words the story is told in — there is no authentic text: all we have are transcriptions of oral renderings, sometimes faithful, sometimes bowdlerised, sometimes elaborated, renderings which themselves may differ greatly from one storyteller to another, even when telling the same story. The words don't matter; what matters is the sequence of events.

But that matters a great deal. If you read all the Brothers Grimm stories, as I've been doing recently, and you happen to be struck by the neatness and power of this one or that one, there's a good chance that you'll find, when you look it up, that the Grimms' source for it was a woman called Dorothea Viehmann. She was a seller of fruit and vegetables, the widow of a tailor, and altogether she contributed 35 of their stories, including some of the best, like *Faithful Johannes*, *The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs*, and *The Goose Girl*. She had the unusual power, according to the brothers Grimm, of not only being able to tell the tale swiftly and vigorously the first time, but also of then being able to go back and retell it slowly, passage by passage, not altering a bit, so they could write it down accurately. Clearly she had worked the story over in her head many times, getting it just right, cutting out everything redundant, making sure everything necessary was in the right place and given its proper weight.

And not interposing anything *literary*. Modern literary fairy tales are almost universally ghastly, in my view, being affected, whimsical, putting on a show, nudging us, winking at us, showing us how clever they are, or how compassionate, or making sure we get the right political message — swanking or ingratiating or hectoring. Away with them! The great folk tales are interested in none of that sort of thing. The American poet James Merrill characterised the voice of the folk tale as “a tone licked clean Over the centuries by mild old tongues, Grandam to cub, serene, anonymous.”

Here's a passage in that sort of tone:

At midnight everyone was asleep except for the nurse, who was sitting beside the cradle in the nursery. She saw the door open and she saw the real queen come in. The queen took the baby out of the cradle, put it to her breast and suckled it. Then she plumped up the pillow, laid the child down again, and covered it up with its little quilt.

And she didn't forget the fawn. She went to the corner where he was lying and stroked his back. Then without a word she left the room.

In the morning the nurse asked the guards if anyone had come into the palace during the night, and they said “No, we haven't seen a soul.” After that the queen came many nights, and never said a word; the nurse always saw her but didn't dare mention it to anyone.

[*Little Brother and Little Sister*]

I could have opened Grimm almost anywhere and found a passage to quote, but I wanted one with midnight in it, to go with David Copperfield and pay tribute to the grandfather clock in *Tom's Midnight Garden*.

Anyway, what that tone says, anonymously and serenely and beyond any doubt, is “These things happened.” The events are located firmly in the past, once upon a time. The narrating voice knows exactly what they were, and what order they happened in, and how best to make these events clear and unambiguous. [Ambiguity is, or can be, one of the virtues of a literary text: who can be sure exactly what Henry James is saying in some of his passages? Are the apparitions in *The Turn of the Screw* objectively there or the product of the unfortunate governess's disordered mind? No-one knows; and how much less powerful the story would be if we did.]

But there can be no ambiguity in the folk tale. The real queen in the passage I read just now from *Little Brother and Little Sister* is as dead as a doornail: we even know where her body is hidden. She's a ghost if ever there was one. Clarity is everything.

That has the corollary that the events of the folk tale, which are shown to us with such brilliant and uninflected clarity, must be interesting in themselves if the story is to work. They must be dramatic, violent, exterior and visible. Consider trying to tell *Emma* as a folk tale:

Once there was a rich man who had a beautiful daughter ...

I think you'd get that far and then you'd have to stop and scratch your head. To try and tell the story of *Emma*, or of *Vanity Fair*, or of *Tom's Midnight Garden*, as a folk tale would be to create a kind of monster; the novel is a complex thing, and many of its events, compared with the ferocious melodrama of the folk tale, are interior and invisible. The ferocious melodrama of the *events* of the folk tale, I should emphasise, because in the voice of the Brothers Grimm's best stories, or for that matter some of those assembled by Katharine Briggs or Italo Calvino or Aleksandr Afanasyev, or for the matter of that in ballads such as *Sir Patrick Spens*, a great folk tale can have something of the same quality I attributed to Philippa Pearce's style earlier on: a 'classical' quality, characterised by clarity and steadiness and coolness of tone.

But *Tom's Midnight Garden* isn't a folk tale, or anything like one; once again, the way it's told is the best way it could be told.

I want to finish my brief look at different aspects of this mysterious thing, the narrator, by looking in a little more detail at some aspects of the narrator's activity in the book itself.

The first thing we encounter, of course, is the opening, and anyone who's tried to write a story knows that the right opening is a very hard thing to get right. Where — at which point in the characters' lives — do you start? Consider the points in the stream of time where the story might just as well have begun. It could have opened with Tom and Peter planning to make their tree house, their project that's later frustrated. Or with the first symptoms of the measles that will separate the brothers for the summer. Or with Alan Kitson and Tom arriving at the Kitsons' flat in the big house crowded round with newer, smaller houses, the house with no visible garden, where Tom's adventure will take place. Or with Tom's mother writing to the Kitsons asking if they can take Tom in till Peter is better. All perfectly reasonable choices. So is the one we have: the story opens with Tom about to leave in the car with Uncle Alan, and feeling bitter and resentful about having to do so. Why is that better than the others? Or is it? Might it have been better to go way back to Hatty, and have the story open with the little Victorian girl looking wide-eyed at the pyjama-clad boy whom nobody else sees?

Well, I think it would have been wrong to begin with Hatty, if only because this is Tom's story and not hers, and the character we see first is the one to whom we feel the story belongs, in some way. One of the characteristics of the classical style is that it's not afraid of the obvious, and it never tries to be original. This is a story about Tom and his adventure: why begin with anyone else? As for when, this moment is pivotal. We can see both Tom's background, where he comes from, the past, the people he's leaving behind, especially the brother he'll miss so much, and the car and the driver who are going to carry him into the future. In the words I quoted at the beginning,

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future —

— the future time when we shall be reading the story.

The opening of a book only occurs once, but that doesn't mean the problems are over when you've found

the best opening. Every sentence that comes afterwards has to be thought over, an appropriate position and stance established for the narrator. I've quoted this observation from the playwright and film director David Mamet elsewhere, but I continue to find it useful, so here it is again: "The first question a film director has to ask is, where do I put the camera?" The film director has to ask this every day, for every shot. So does the author, every day, for every paragraph. How close to the characters is the narrator going to stand? Close enough to see them in detail, at least. A book that begins "All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" had better quite quickly find a particular family to focus on, or the reader in search of a novel will take it for a work of sociology. A novel needs to look closely at people.

I'll finish with three examples of the narrator's looking closely, and of her perfect tact in doing so, by which I mean finding precisely the best spot to look from and the best moment to do it.

The first is where Tom is questioning Uncle Alan about Time. Uncle Alan, as the narrator never says but as we can see with perfect clarity, is an overbearing know-all who enjoys the domination he's established over his wife and which he'd like to establish over Tom.

"What *is* Time like, Uncle Alan?" asked Tom.

His uncle put his book down altogether; and his aunt nervously put down her mending, too.

"Tom," she said, "you shouldn't always be asking such very odd questions of your uncle. He's tired after his day's work."

"No, no, Gwen. A child's questions should certainly be answered. All I would object to Tom's questions is their lack of connexion, and sometimes of seriousness, too. Look at his first question: he asked whether it would be possible to go through a door — he actually asked *how* it would be possible!"

"Well!" cried Tom's aunt, with a relief that came from her not having paid attention to the earlier conversation. "Well, that seems a very sensible idea — so sensible that it's almost silly!"

Alan Kitson raised his eyebrows, and his wife went on hurriedly: "You know what I mean — going through a door's such an everyday happening."

The passage continues in the same vein, and there's plenty there to show us what the narrator is doing: showing us what a pompous bully Alan is by looking not at him but at Gwen, and her nervous reactions to everything he says or might say.

[Two other tiny points in her destruction of Alan Kitson: in the final section, where Tom wakes the household by crying out in distress when he finds the garden isn't there, Alan explains to the other tenant on their floor that his wife's nephew has been sleep-walking: deflecting some of the blame on to her. Tom is his own nephew as well, by marriage: it wouldn't have cost him much to say "my nephew".

Then next day when they learn that Mrs Bartholomew upstairs expects an apology for the noise in the night, when Aunt Gwen is ready to defend Tom and protest strongly, he shrinks back and says "Careful, Gwen! She is the landlady. If we upset her, she could be very awkward."

It's the most delicate dissection of a bully, all done by looking in the right direction at the right moment].

The second example of looking closely from the right spot comes at the end of Tom's series of encounters

with Hatty, when they skate to Ely and climb the tower of the cathedral. We start with a glimpse from Hatty's point of view:

From the other side of the leads, Hatty looked round to see where Tom had got to. She saw, instead of one boy, two: they were very much alike, and dressed identically in pyjamas. The second boy had the same insubstantial look that she had detected recently in Tom himself: she was almost sure that she could see the tower parapet through them both. She stared in wonderment.

"But, Tom, where's the garden?" Peter was saying, rather querulously. "I thought you were with Hatty, in the garden."

Tom answered directly, because he felt in his bones that time was short, and shortening. "The garden's back there," he said briefly, flinging his arm outwards, in the direction of Castleford.

"And Hatty's here."

"Where? I can't see her," said Peter.

Tom was pointing with his finger, and Peter was facing Hatty across the leads — she was the only one among the sightseers who had turned in his direction.

"There!" said Tom. "Right opposite to you — the one carrying skates."

"But that" — said Peter indignantly — "that's not Hatty: that's a grown-up woman!"

Tom, staring at Hatty as though he were seeing her for the first time, opened his mouth to speak: but he could not.

"Time" — called the tower-keeper — "time to go down again, if you please, ladies and gentlemen!"

At that point we the readers needed to see Hatty through other eyes than Tom's. Peter was the only other character who could both have seen her and expressed the meaning of what he saw, without knowing it himself, to Tom. And I can feel the delight that must have touched Philippa Pearce as she thought of the tower-keeper's intervention: "Time!"

I shall end where the book ends, with that marvellous final paragraph [in the true meaning of that word: it's a marvel, a wonder, something miraculous]. It begins:

Afterwards, Aunt Gwen tried to describe to her husband that second parting between them —

— between Tom and Mrs Bartholomew, that is. Why does the narrator not tell us directly what happened, instead of giving the job to Aunt Gwen? And if we are to see it through Aunt Gwen's eyes, why not tell us what she sees at that moment, instead of skipping ahead to a time when she, the narrator, could say "afterwards"?

To my mind that would be rather like asking "Why did Mozart write this note, and not that one?" The only answer is "Because he was Mozart." When we see perfection we should acknowledge it and applaud. That famous last paragraph *is* perfect, and part of its perfection is its perfect tact, that very classical virtue.

Consider the consequences of finding the last line, "he put his arms right round her and he hugged her goodbye as if she were a little girl", told in the voice of the narrator. How wrong that would seem! What a

catastrophic error! In the narrator's voice those words would sound stridently sentimental, when what we need most is the warm depth of true feeling. The genius of this passage, of course, is that Gwen expresses the feeling without knowing what she's saying, and allows us to make the connection. It has to come afterwards, because we don't need the narrator telling us what Gwen was feeling as she was feeling it: we need her own words as she tells her husband what she's seen. In some ways Aunt Gwen, that kindly, nervous, occasionally silly woman who is much more courageous and infinitely more perceptive than her husband, is the heroine of this book. Like the gardener Abel, the only one from Hatty's time who can see Tom, she can see across time to the little girl that Mrs Bartholomew was, and she offers that vision to her husband, knowing, as she says, that he'll think it absurd.

Well, so much the worse for those who are clever enough to think things absurd and scoff at them on that account, and all praise to those who offer their visions to the clever ones, in spite of all disappointment.

There are many other things to say about this book, and about the mysterious and shadowy figure of the narrator, and about other figures as well. Author and narrator are not the only participants in the process of reading. There is the real reader, and there's that shadowy figure, the reader the book seems to expect. And then there's that other even more shadowy figure, the implied author [or as I prefer to say, the inferred author].

And then there's Mr Common Sense, the Reader Who Will Not Be Fooled. But he doesn't come to lectures, so we can forget about him, and in any case all my time is used up.

Philip Pullman

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