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„Social Didacticism in Edith Nesbit’s Children’s Literature: A literary analysis of *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, *Five Children and It* and *The Railway Children*“

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I hereby confirm that this diploma thesis was written by myself. I have clearly marked as a quote everything that was taken over verbatim from secondary literature. I have also indicated when I have taken over ideas from secondary sources.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literary texts can fulfil a great number of purposes. For example, they can be persuasive, instructive or entertaining. This is especially true for children's literature. However, the purposes of children's texts changed particularly during the nineteenth century. Early in the Victorian period the majority of children's literature was used as a medium to instruct and teach children. In fact children's texts as a form of entertainment for children, as they are known today, gained significant importance during the mid- and late Victorian periods with the publication of texts such as *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll and *The Water Babies* by Charles Kingsley. Obviously, things do not change from one day to another. Changes take place gradually and over a longer time period. This is why children's literature in the second half of the century still remained didactic to some extent. Many mid- and late Victorian authors took the opportunity to convey social values and norms via their literary works. This phenomenon – now reduced to its most basic meaning - is famously known as 'social didacticism'.

This diploma thesis seeks to investigate to what extent social didacticism is visible and traceable in the three late Victorian children's novels *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), *Five Children and It* (1902) and *The Railway Children* (1906) written by the extraordinary writer Edith Nesbit. Edith Nesbit is known as 'a woman of passion' (see Briggs, *Edith Nesbit*), as Julia Briggs calls her in Nesbit's biography. With Nesbit's marriage to Hubert Bland, Edith quickly found her way into politics. Her husband, being founder member of the Fabian Society, was in favour of the emerging socialism of the 1880s. The Society, founded mainly by intellectuals from middle and upper classes in 1884, is considered as forerunner of today's Labour Party. Its main principle was the promotion of equality and social justice within the existent social classes of nineteenth century British society. Nesbit participated in the Society too, but she was not considered as activist in the Society as her beloved husband Hubert. It can be assumed that Nesbit was influenced by her husband in her political thinking and that her political engagement was reflected in her literature to some extent. Carpenter basically agrees with this statement, but also expresses his doubts about Nesbit's political engagement:

A reader searching for superficial evidence of Edith Nesbit's socialism will not have far to look in her books. [...] In fact there is no real contradiction between her life and her work. Her support of the socialist cause was only skin deep. She revelled in the atmosphere created by the Fabians without having much intellectual grasp of their doctrines. (Carpenter 127 - 128)

The main research question underlying this diploma thesis is therefore concerned with Edith Nesbit's integration of her political beliefs into her literature and the influence of the Fabian Society on her writing. By means of a detailed literary analysis of the three primary texts, which have already been listed above, I will try to investigate to what extent and through which ways Edith Nesbit's political engagement and her beliefs become visible in her texts. As I can only make assumptions about Nesbit's intentions and beliefs and because opinions on the matter are highly divergent, it will be impossible to give a finite and conclusive answer as to whether Nesbit consciously included Fabian socialist values or not. The conclusion of this thesis will therefore outline certain tendencies which will be identified in the literary analysis of the three primary texts.

To understand the concept of 'social didacticism' and above all, to comprehend the literary analysis, the first chapter of the thesis will provide historical background information on politics, economics and British society in the second half of the nineteenth century. To create a link between the theoretical and the analytical part of the thesis, I will additionally consider the role of ideologies and the effects they can have on children's literature. Emphasis will be put on the various levels of ideologies and the role of the reader. In this context the interrelation between author, reader and society will be specifically focused on. In a final step the literary analysis of the three children's novels by Edith Nesbit will be carried out. The texts will be analysed with specific regard to the theoretical part of the thesis and constitutes the core of the thesis. Furthermore, it has to be pointed out that the interpretation of the texts is based on accurate research, marked as quotations and listed in the bibliography, and likewise results from my personal analysis and opinion. To outline differences and similarities more precisely, I have decided to analyse all texts in one go. More concretely, all texts will be analysed according to various theoretical literary aspects, such as, for example, characterisation, point of view, narrative

technique, language and style, sex, gender and expression of social values. To achieve validity and to illustrate my assumptions, quotations from the three children's novels will be included in the thesis.

2. GREAT BRITAIN'S SOCIETY AND POLITICS BETWEEN 1875 AND 1906

In this chapter, the theoretical background of the thesis will be laid out. The chapter provides the historical and theoretical base which facilitates the understanding of the literary analysis of Edith Nesbit's novels *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, *Five Children and It* and *The Railway Children* with regard to social didacticism. To get a first impression the social, political and economic issues which were prevailing during the nineteenth century will be taken into account. The main focus will be put on the Late Victorian Period ranging from around 1880 until roughly 1906 because the primary texts were published in that time. As my research question is concerned with social didacticism, emphasis will be laid on the Fabian Society, its politics, members, intentions and achievements. This information is crucial for the understanding of Edith Nesbit's political engagement and her values. To begin with, an overview of nineteenth century British living conditions will be given.

2.1 Social Life in the Victorian Period

The Victorian period, named after Queen Victoria, is marked by great changes in terms of politics, economics and social life. For example, the socialist movement, with its focus to promote equality between the social classes and to improve Great Britain's living conditions, set in during these periods. It is crucial to consider the historical background, with special regard to society, class and labour, in order to understand the political activities of that time. As the three primary texts are all children's novels and concerned with family life, it is important to outline the values and beliefs of late Victorian families. All information, provided in this chapter, will facilitate the understanding of late Victorian society, political and economic change. Furthermore the background information given in the following subsections will help the reader to fully grasp the literary analysis of Nesbit's novels *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, *Five Children and It* and *The Railway Children*. To start with, the aspect of class and labour will be taken into consideration.

2.1.1 Class and Labour

In 19th century England, British society was structured by an existing class system. The term 'class' was used for the first time during the 18th century and refers to various groups of British Society. The various classes differ from each other in terms of lifestyle, wealth, education, power, living and working conditions as well as culture (Landow). Mitchell (17) points out that the various classes, of course living in separated areas, shared different standards. For example, customs, religion as well as hours and names of meals differed from each other in the various social classes. People were also expected to conform to their classes' standards and it was considered highly inappropriate to act below or beyond one's own class. For instance, in the railway people were expected to stick to the carriages provided for the various classes: "first class", "second class" and "third class". Although "[i]n the strictest legal sense, England had only two classes: aristocrats (who inherited titles and land) and commoners (everyone else)" (Mitchell 17 – 18), a more precise distinction can be made between upper classes, middle classes and lower classes (Landow). The working classes, making up around 75% of the British population in the nineteenth century (Harrison 76) were paid a very low weekly or daily wage (Mitchell 18). The most common working professions were those of domestic servants, agricultural and factory labourers. In addition, a common differentiation was made between unskilled, semiskilled and skilled workers like for example in the textile industry, fishing and transportation. The skilled workers, making up 15% of the working class members (19) and including professions such as engineers, composers and iron-founders (Harrison 68), can be taken as an extra subclass of the working class as they enjoyed more education and commonly did an apprenticeship (Mitchell 19). This resulted in a more stable income, between 39s and 42s¹ a week (Harrison 68), and consequently in better living conditions (Mitchell 19). Semi-skilled workers were miners and mill workers while unskilled workers were usually railway porters and pundits, costermongers and railway navvies (Landow). These people were living in poor living conditions. For example, the majority of working class

¹ The Victorian money system was made up by pounds (£), shillings (s) and pennies (p). There were 20s in £1, 12p in 1s and 240p in £1. A £1 coin was called a Sovereign. A coin worth 1 pound and 1 shilling was called a Guinea (Landow).

members were not able to buy an accommodation. The houses, or simply parts of a house, were rented by the working members. Water closets were shared with other families and their main diet was made up by bread and potatoes (Harrison 69 – 72). In Great Britain the poor working classes stood in contrast with the more powerful middle classes. Indeed, during the nineteenth century British middle classes gained in importance, rising from around 15% in 1837 to approximately 25% in 1901. The middle classes were made up by everyone who could be placed between the upper classes and the working classes (Mitchell 20). The Victorian middle class can be divided into upper and lower middle class. The upper middle classes were mostly professionals including clergymen, military and naval officers, men in the medical and law branches, university professors, merchants, manufacturers and bankers. The lower middle class, such as shopkeepers and clerical workers, did not have any further education; however, literacy was obligatory. Thirdly there were the upper classes or the so-called ruling elite. The upper classes were the most powerful and wealthy members of the society but even though the income of the middle, working and upper classes varied to a great extent, similar virtues were shared among its members. Hard work, sexual morality, individual responsibility, education, family life and togetherness were valued highly (21 - 22). At the beginning of the century British upper classes included the aristocracy and the landed gentry. They did not do any work per se, but earned their money from investments and inherited land (18). In other words, acres of land which were rented out on long-term leases (22) ensured their wealthy and prosperous lifestyle. In the late nineteenth century, the upper classes were extended by so-called nouveau riches. Many men, who acquired wealth in business, banking and industry, were granted peerage. The aristocracy and gentry were not hostile to this new development because the nobility as a distinct class was hard pressed in the mid- and late nineteenth century (Harrison 30). As stated above the aristocracy and the landed gentry were relying on their owned land, however, in the years between 1873 and 1896, known as the Great Depression, Great Britain's economy, previously marked by progress and advance in the Industrial Revolution, experienced stagnation. This resulted in a downfall of prices, of interest rates as well as of profits (16). Agriculture was suffering depression which meant that land was becoming a declining asset (30). The

granting of peerage to recent riches was therefore a way to maintain British upper classes and was therefore accepted by the landed gentry and the landed gentry.

Indeed, British society was built up strictly according to these three classes, for example, church and chapel seats, railway trains and public houses were even divided into three separate areas (Read 23). It is thus no wonder that in the course of the nineteenth century conflicts between the various classes appeared. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the existing aristocracy exerted all its political power and deprived the middle and working classes from their political power. In the course of the nineteenth century, the middle classes managed to gain increasing influence on the United Kingdom's politics while the working classes still had no say at all. With the progress of the Industrial Revolution, the working classes developed an extremely hostile attitude towards the middle and upper classes (Landow). The extension of the political nation and the gradual widening of franchise in Great Britain increased the political power of the middle classes and offered the possibility for the upper and middle classes to collaborate (Harrison 49). The working class was consequently left out and its members felt completely exploited by the ruling middle classes (Martin 20) and upper classes. With the emergence of Socialism in the 1880s, which will be discussed later in this chapter, the working classes achieved more labour rights as well as rights in politics.

2.1.2 The Role of Women

The role of women changed enormously during the nineteenth century. Women were taking on a hugely inferior position in early Victorian society, which was particularly male-dominated. Women's mere goal in life was marriage and the upbringing of children (Harrison 157). Usually, marriage took place between women and men coming from the same social background, except for female domestic servants, who had the right to marry lower-middle class tradesmen. Women married at the average age of twenty-five and men at twenty-seven (Mitchell 142). Traditionally, women were required to represent the typically Victorian 'Angel of the House', being innocent, pure-minded and sexually

ignorant until marriage. An ideal Victorian woman was required to fulfil her husband's needs and to take care of their home (Harrison 157), which was the families' "haven, a sanctuary, a place of peace and emotional security" (158). While men had to earn the living for their family, women were not expected to work, except for the working class as families could not survive with a single wage (165). Many women also started to write if their husband or father did not manage to make enough money for the family's living. For example, the Brontë sisters started to write in order to support their family (Altick 51) and also Edith Nesbit sold literature in order to earn some money (Carpenter 127). As female writer in the Victorian period were facing prejudices, they made use of masculine *noms de plume*. Mary Ann Evans wrote under the name of George Eliot, Anne, Charlotte and Emily Brontë chose the pen names Acton, Currer and Ellis Bell (Altick 51) and Edith Nesbit adopted the pseudonym E. Nesbit. The occupations of women differed from each other depending on the various social classes. Upper class and middle class women were spending most of their leisure time with needlework, painting, playing the piano or harp and with flower arrangements. They were also very much engaged in charity work. For example, upper class women visited local schools the family supported and helped the unfortunates, for example, by bringing soup or blankets. The women disposed of lots of leisure time, which was a sign of status in the Victorian period. The middle class family usually had at least one domestic servant, who was responsible for the children and the household. Most of the families even had a governess, who taught the children in the nursery. To fill their time, women additionally read a lot. This helped to raise the importance of literature as the reading public was enlarged (51 – 52). Working class women had to support their husbands by working for example in factories, mills and shops under unhealthy conditions. They worked long hours for low wages (56 - 57) and were "[e]xcept for children, [...] the most exploited of all workers." (Altick 57) In fact women of all social classes were considered as second-class citizens (57). The husband was the head of the family and "had legal and economic control over his wife, children, and servants." (Mitchell 142) However, things changed considerably during the 1870s and 1880s. Joan Perkin, for example, points out that

[i]t was the Victorians who pioneered the emancipation of women. [...] In the long history of women's oppression, this makes the nineteenth century – the 'long' nineteenth century between the French Revolution and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* [...] - the pivotal period of change. (Perkin 3)

Through the Married Women's Act of 1882, which "placed a wife in regard to her property upon the same footing [...] as if she were unmarried" (339), women became more independent and were offered the possibility to control their own property. Additionally, there was a change from large families to rather small ones (339). An average mid-nineteenth century family had six children and one-fifth of all families had ten or even more (Mitchell 142). In the late Victorian period, women were more in control of their family life due to increasing birth control (Perkin 499) and as a consequence the birth rate fell gradually by 1900. In 1880, though still very limited, the employment opportunities were slowly opened up to women, making it possible for them to work, for example, as schoolteachers, typists, telephone operators and civil workers (Harrison 167). Finally, through the Education Act of 1870 (171), education improved and women were encouraged to take part in local government and higher education (173). In contrast to the early and mid-nineteenth century, women in the late Victorian period had a more independent life (177).

2.1.3 Victorian Children

Although many changes – political, economic and social ones - took place during the Victorian Period, children were always playing an important role in nineteenth century British society. The great virtues of Victorian society were family life and togetherness (Mitchell 146) However, women, coming from a more wealthy background, spent only approximately one or two hours a day with their children because servants, such as nannies, nursemaids and governesses, were hired to take care of the children. Children were even locally separated from their mothers in order to "give them a sheltered and structured routine and to train their character" (146). This was traditionally done by nursery rooms located on a separate floor or separate wings of the house. Considering themselves as inexperienced, middle and upper class women, right after the

child's birth, transferred all their motherly work to trained nannies, nursemaids and later to governesses and schools (146). The nannies, addressing the children by using the forms 'Miss' and 'Master', were not only responsible for teaching the children discipline, self-control and obedience, but also played with and read to them (147). The main goal was thus to teach them etiquette and integrate them into high-society life (149). To achieve appropriate behaviour, the children were given little etiquette books, usually pocket sized, including instructions of how to act appropriately in various situations (Fletcher 11). A governess was a well-educated young woman who was either teaching at a school or hired by middle and upper class families to teach their children. The daily governess travelled to her employer's house every day (Peterson 5) while the resident governess lived with her employer's family. Mostly governesses were responsible for the girl's education and for teaching the girls Victorian values and manners, including conversation, speech, taste, posture, personal presentation as well as some general knowledge in history, French and geography. Boys were taught by the governesses until they were old enough to attend school. The role of the governess in a middle and upper class family was quite ambiguous because she was neither a servant nor a family member (Mitchell 178 – 179). Most of the time the governesses stayed in the background (Peterson 5), for example instead of eating with the adults, they usually ate with the children (Mitchell 179). In the nineteenth century the hiring of a governess was a symbol and outer representation of the power and economic wealth of a family (Peterson 5).

In the Victorian period boys and girls received different kinds of education. At the age of seven boys were sent to local grammar schools, public schools or boarding schools (Davidoff 78). Only the wealthy elite went to 'public schools' such as Eton, Winchester, Westminster and St Paul's. The schools focused on teaching gentlemanly behaviour and self-confidence. They also offered their students the possibility to make connections and build up networks to serve them in their later adult life. At 'grammar schools', which were fee-charging as well, boys received education in Latin, Ancient Greek, literature and sport (Roberts 71). In contrast to the boys, girls usually stayed at home and were taught household skills and reading by their mothers, aunts, older sisters (79) and governesses (101). Girls coming from a wealthy family also learned French,

music and drawing (79). The main aim was to prepare the girls for the marriage market (101). Only in the later decades of the nineteenth century girls were allowed schooling in girl's private schools and academic high schools for girls (Roberts 72). The reason for this was mainly the Education Act of 1870, which increased schooling and improved education in Great Britain. Family life and education was distinctly different in the middle and working classes. For the middle classes, a full-scale nurse was not always affordable. Typically, a nurse-girl was looking after the children. The children's mother was usually doing some teaching and watched the children if the nurse-girl was occupied with other work (148). Many children from the working classes lived in poverty and bad social conditions. They were often malnourished and very dirty. Early on, most of the working class children had to help with the household and the upbringing of their little siblings when their parents were working (148). In the early decades of the Victorian period, many children were working too, mostly in coal mines, factories and the agricultural domain. The employers took advantage of the children as they were easy to intimidate and at cheap at the same time (34). Two-thirds of working class children did not receive any education at all. Some children attended 'Sunday School', which were religiously sponsored, or 'charity schools', established by Philanthropists. While working class children from the countryside could also attend so-called 'dame schools', working class children living in the cities usually attended 'ragged schools', which charged a fee of a penny. In all schools education was 'primary' teaching the working class children the basics in writing, reading and arithmetic (71 – 72). The working class children who could attend schools and lived with their families were lucky compared to the great many orphans of the nineteenth century. Many children lost their parents because of workplace accidents, infections, tuberculosis and while child birth (Mitchell 143). Orphans were then sent to orphanages, where girls were trained as domestic servants and boys were taught trade, such as shoemaking or carpentry (93). Unfortunately, as the number of orphaned children was extremely high, the waiting lists were full and many orphans were forced to go into workhouses (Landow). Workhouses were built for the unabled, the sick, the elderly, the mentally incapacitated and orphans. Additionally, able-bodied families entered the house if they could not afford their own living and needed help. The idea behind the institution, initiated

by the government with the aim to relief the poor and to diminish pauperism, was to encourage working class members to take any possible job instead of asking for help. The conditions of the workhouses were horrible. Families and couples were split up, parents were forbidden to see their children, nutrition was unsatisfying and able-bodied people were assigned to tedious and boring tasks like breaking up stones for roadmending (Mitchell 91 – 95).

Luckily, towards the end of the nineteenth century things improved a little due to compulsory schooling, restrictions on child labour and rising prosperity and a so-called “culture of childhood” came into being. With this development, children’s literature started to take on a crucial role. Children’s books were written that are still popular today (Mitchell 149). One of the best examples is perhaps Lewis Carroll’s famous *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Still, it has to be pointed out that in Victorian literature children’s lives were often depicted in a very sentimental and idealistic way. Children were presented as naturally good, appealing, innocent and spontaneous in order to protect them from the outside world. The Victorians had the tendency to protect their children, and even teenagers, from unsuitable information, being linked to economics, morality and sexuality (148).

2.2 Politics and Economics: the Socialist Movement during the 1880s

During the early and mid-Victorian period Great Britain was profiting a lot from the Industrial Revolution, which set in around 1780. In addition to the agrarian revolution, causing an increase in agricultural production and output (Winstanley 207), new industrial techniques were developed, the population grew enormously, trade was expanded and communications by railroad and canal were improved (Wood 4). Great Britain was marked by a shift from agricultural economy to manufacturing and by a transformation into a wealthy, stable and progressing state. In contrast, people living during the late Victorian period were less fortunate, as the time was overshadowed by an increased poverty rate, economic depression and a growing urbanisation (Mitchell 2 – 5). Towards the end of the nineteenth century Great Britain became considerably

overcrowded. Between 1871 and 1901, Britain's population reached up to approximately 37 million (Harrison 13 – 16). Today, the number is presumably twice as much, but in those days accommodations in the overcrowded cities were rare and often unaffordable for working class members. Because the majority of factories were situated in the cities, more and more working people moved into the suburban areas. Many poor working class people could not even afford their own homes and rented single-room accommodations, often without any sanitation (Landow). Additionally, population grew considerably because of the improved health care causing a declining mortality rate. For the reasons mentioned above, Britain's population density grew remarkably (Harrison 13 - 16). Unfortunately, this development went hand in hand with Great Britain's economy becoming uneven and slow. In the late Victorian period, Britain's industrial revolution came to an end and its industry began to fall behind America, Germany and France. (Harrison 16 – 18). As a result, the poverty rate increased enormously, for example, approximately 30% of the population living in London was unemployed (Lee 222). According to Read (247) the poverty rate in the United Kingdom reached a peak during the 1860s. This went hand in hand with an agricultural depression in the 1870s resulting from a series of bad harvests and the impossibility to compete with US-American and Canadian agriculture. Food gradually got rarer in the United Kingdom, while the population continued to grow despite of waves of emigrations to Australia, New Zealand and North America (Mitchell 13 – 14).

In the 1880s these conditions sought fundamental alterations by the State and people, especially the working class members who were suffering the most, started to call for actions and interventions. The need for social reforms increased dramatically (Lee 222 - 223) and the socialist movement can therefore be considered as a response to Great Britain's misery and its industrial depression (Clayes 197). The already existing political systems during the 1880s - *Conservatism* under Benjamin Disraeli and *Liberalism* under William Gladstone - obviously failed to meet the expectations of the working class members and parties were forced to change their political programmes. Because of the working classes' discontent as well as the electorate's enlargement, there was a need for a further political party. The alternative was a new working class party with its focus on socialism. However, the new party

could not persist on its own, as the new socialists were lacking financial support because the electorate favoured the already existing parties (Lee 243 – 244). The consequence was that "a handful of working class MPs were elected in a Labour ticket within the broad church of Liberal party [and] took part in general elections between 1868 and 1895." (Lee 244) In other words, the Labour party was initially part of the more powerful Liberal party. Slowly but surely, however, several groups developed within the framework of *Socialism*. The most famous ones were the *Social Democratic Federation*, established by H.M Hyndman in 1884, the *Socialist League* by William Morris, and the *Fabian Society*, established in 1884 (Lee 245). However, it is crucial to keep in mind that at the beginning the socialist groups were very little in number. For instance, it has been pointed out that

[n]umerically the socialists were only a small body – probably no more than 2000 in the 1880s and perhaps 20 – 30,000 by 1900 – but their influence was widespread, especially in London and the industrial North. Their activities, and above all their propaganda, set up a ferment of social ideas which captivated a whole generation of young people in the nineties and carried over into the first decade of the new century. (Harrison 145)

The societies were not able to reach the working classes at first, but through the necessary support by the trade unions, the societies achieved wider popularity (Hunt 261). Later, when the socialist party was established and more widely accepted, it led various debates, organised meetings and had great influence on Britain's education and literature. Youth clubs, such as cycling clubs, field clubs and scouting were organised; meetings were held regularly and pamphlets and newspapers were distributed weekly (Harrison 145 – 146). In addition, the role of women in politics changed considerably in those days. Although many men acted rather hostile towards active women and restricted them to their household responsibilities and child care, many women were active in these left-wing political groups, especially in the Fabian Society and in the Social Democratic Federation (Richardson 180). Richardson claims that

both organizations were committed to women's suffrage and working women made a significant political contribution at the local and neighbourhood level even though family and work commitments meant they were often unable to stand for formal office. (qtd. in Graves 180)

This, however, will be considered in more detail in the following chapter. All in all it can be pointed out that from the 1880s onwards Great Britain was characterised by a distinct socialist movement (Harrison 146).

2.3 The Fabian Society : 1884 - 1906

During the late nineteenth century, there was a great need for political changes in Great Britain, which was primarily triggered by Britain's growing working classes. The direct consequence was a development of various socialist groups including the famous *Fabian Society*. Set up in 1884 in London, the society was founded mainly by intellectuals (Lee 245), coming from a middle-class background (Clayes 197). Edith Nesbit's husband Hubert Bland as well as Frank Podmore, Edward Pease, Beatrice and Sydney Webb as well as Nesbit's close friends George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells were the earliest members of the Society (197). Right from the beginning the Fabian Society considered itself as anti-revolutionary (Clayes 196). This meant that "[t]he Fabian Socialists [...] gave stress to a gradualist, bureaucratic, elitist and reformist agenda." (Clayes 197) The Society's strategy therefore refers to a peaceful and slow change in society, mainly achieved through awareness-raising including convincing and persuasive public meetings and lectures. The society's gradualist strategy even finds itself reflected in the society's name, referring to the Roman general Fabius who "eventually defeated Hannibal" (Hunt 261) and was "reputed to have worn his enemies down by steady and determined resistance rather than large-scale battles" (Clayes 196). Frank Podmore, early member of the Fabian Society and friend of Nesbit and her husband Hubert Bland, explains the Fabian Society's strategy as the following:

For the right moment you must wait, as Fabius did most patiently, when warring against Hannibal, though many censured his delays; but when the time comes you must strike hard, as Fabius did, or your waiting will be in vain and fruitless. (Pease 27)

Generally speaking the Society's intention was to serve the general good and it primarily put focus on the state's politics (Clayes 197) "having in view the advance of Socialism in England" (Pease 26). In that way the society stood in great contrast with other nineteenth century socialist groups which were

thoroughly anti-political and anti-partisan (Clayes 197). Thus, the Fabian Society

place[d] great stress on the future role of a trained managerial class of experts dedicated to bureaucratic efficiency, recruited meritocratically, introducing reforms gradually and by rational argument, and supportive of democracy in the workplace as well as in politics. (Clayes 197 -198)

As stated above, the strategy was meant to be gradualist and achieved through education and spread through literature. All in all, the Society was made up by seven writers. The seven writers, “all of them far above the average in ability” (Pease 65) were George Bernard Shaw, who was also the editor of the book (66), Annie Besant, William Clarke, Hubert Bland, Sidney Webb, Graham Wallas and Sydney Olivier (48). All seven were responsible for the composition of the famous “Fabian Essays”, being a book and not a collection of essays (Pease 65), in which the values and ideals of the Fabians were set out. It has even been pointed out that the book makes up “the most important theoretical presentation of the [...] English brand of evolutionary Socialism”. (Cole 121) The “Fabian Essays” was officially published in 1889 and its second edition was immediately released in March 1890. In the following years the book was even translated into other languages such as Dutch and Norwegian (Pease 67). Pease points out that the “Fabian Essays”

presented the case for Socialism in plain language which everybody could understand. It based Socialism, not on the speculations of [the] German philosopher [Karl Marx], but on the obvious evolution of society as we see it around us. It accepted economic science as taught by the accredited British professors; it built up the edifice of Socialism on the foundations of our existing political and social institutions: it proved that Socialism was but the next step in the development of society, rendered inevitably by the changes which followed from the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century. (Pease 68)

Additionally, a manifesto as well as a basis were formulated, which both comprise the Society’s basic beliefs and general demands. Due to its length, the “Manifesto” (Tract Number Two) is attached to and can be found in the Appendix. “The Basis”, summing up the main principles, goes as the following:

The Fabian Society consists of Socialists.

It therefore aims at the reorganisation of Society by the emancipation of Land and Industrial Capital from individual and class ownership, and the vesting of them in the community for the general

benefit. In this way only can the natural and acquired advantages of the country be equitably shared by the whole people.

The Society accordingly works for the extinction of private property in Land and of the consequent individual appropriation, in the form of Rent, of the price paid for permission to use the earth, as well as for the advantages of superior soils and sites.

The Society, further, works for the transfer to the community of the administration of such industrial Capital as can conveniently be managed socially. For, owing to the monopoly of the means of production in the past, industrial inventions and the transformation of surplus income into Capital have mainly enriched the proprietary class, the worker being now dependent on that class for leave to earn living.

If these measures be carried out, without compensation (though not without such relief to expropriated individuals as may seem fit to the community), Rent and Interest will be added to the rewards of labour, the idle class now living on the labour of others will necessarily disappear, and practical equality of opportunity will be maintained by the spontaneous action of economic forces with much less interference with personal liberty than the present system entails.

For the attainment of these ends the Fabian Society looks to the spread of Socialist opinions, and the social and political changes consequent thereon, *including the establishment of equal citizenship for men and women*. It seeks to achieve these ends by the general dissemination of knowledge as to the relation between the individual and Society in its economic, ethical, and political aspects. (Pease 201 – 202)

In other words, the main intentions of the Fabian Society were to fight poverty and the inequality of wealth, to guarantee an improvement of the English economy and to ensure equality between females and males. This was meant to be achieved through trade unionism, which encouraged the Society to spread their beliefs as rapidly as possible. Indeed, the effects of these various publications and the lectures held regularly by the members of the Society were outstanding. The membership increased steadily between 1884 and 1890; Local Fabian Societies were founded for example in Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Manchester and Oldham, and additionally the “Fabian News” was published monthly from 1891 onwards (74 – 75). In other words, the Fabian Society was very successful. Its main success was the introduction of obligatory and free elementary education for all classes, a maximum of 8 hour working days or 48 hours a week, the abolishment of child work until the age of 16 and the introduction of a minimum wage of 30s for all workers, being male and female (Barker 482 – 484). The reforms encouraged by the Society clearly helped to increase the social conditions of the country and improved the living conditions of the working classes in particular. In addition, the Society managed

to advance Socialism in the United Kingdom. In fact the rapid progress of the Fabian Society and that of other socialist groups finally led to the foundation of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1900 (Pease 77). The major goal was to achieve unification between the various British socialist and working class groups including the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the Scottish Parliamentary Labour Party, the Social Democratic Federation and of course, the Fabian Society (Lee 242). Richard Bomford points out that

[n]either the Fabian Society or the other main Socialist group, the Social Democratic Federation, were merged into the ILP but continued a separate existence. The Fabian Society did however support the ILP strongly by supplying political ammunition for the fight against reactionaries. I suppose they were the "think tank" of the Socialist movement. (Bomford)

The Fabian Society of London continued to hold regular meetings and had its most influence through the press by publishing articles in the Liberal "The Speaker" and the "Star". It was only in 1888 that the Fabian Society started to additionally collaborate with trade unions and showed interest into the Co-operative movement². Their first success was marked by the first Fair Wages Clause in Contracts achieved by the Annie Besant and Rev. Stewart Headlam in collaboration with the Trade Union in 1888 (82 – 83). Nevertheless, the Society's political interests did not cease, and the General Elections in 1892 were keenly anticipated by the members. The Conservatives won the elections against the former more powerful Liberals. A Labour Party did not take part as such. In 1894 Bernard Shaw therefore composed an article, entitled "To your Tents, O Israel" in which he presented the importance of a Labour Party and the possible ways of forming it. The article attracted a wide range of readers including thousands of working class politicians (84-87). Edward Pease even claims that "the "Plan of Campaign for Labour", as it was called, did much to prepare the ground for the Labour Party which was founded so easily and flourished so vigorously in the first years of the twentieth century" (88). In 1899 the first socialist conference was called out by the Parliamentary Committee with the main intention of devising "ways and means for securing an increased

² The Co-operative movement disapproved of competitive individualism in trade, including food and textile, and favoured mutual assistance and labour by paying dividends to co-operative society's members. Purchasing and manufacturing was organised by the Co-operative Wholesale Society. In the late nineteenth century the movement was also engaged in raising the political empowerment of working class women (Cannon 244).

number of Labour members in the next Parliament.” (Pease 112) The two delegates sent out from the Fabian Society were Bernard Shaw and Edward Pease and “[t]his conference resulted in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee.” (Bomford) This Committee was not yet founded as a Party, but rather as a Group with the intention to win seats in the Parliament (Pease 114). In 1903 the Labour Representation Committee was transformed into a Party and the Fabian Society as a whole was quite in favour of it, even though some of its members were still part of the Liberal Party (114). In that period, the Fabian Society’s socialist ideas had great influence on the Liberals as well, which “no longer advocated a policy of laissez-faire in government [and] had turned against individualism and classical economics and favored [sic] extending the powers of the state to abolish poverty.” (Bomford) It was from 1906 onwards that the term ‘Labour Party’ as a short form of ‘Labour Representation Committee’ was officially used (Lee 242). In the United Kingdom, the Labour Party was thus standing in competition with the Liberals and the Conservatives. The Fabian Society was still a Society standing on its own, however, affiliated as a whole to the newly developed Labour Party (Pease 114).

3. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND THE ROLE OF IDEOLOGIES

Having outlined the historical background, this chapter will take into account the aspect of the role of ideologies in children's literature. Children are easily influenced by their surroundings, their parents and also by literature. For this reason literature was primarily used in an instructive way during the nineteenth century. Many literary texts were used to teach the children manners and raise them to gentlemen and ladies. This diploma thesis is concerned with Edith Nesbit's political and social ideology, to what extent it becomes visible in her texts and instructs her readers. Therefore the aim of this chapter is to outline the great influence of children's literature on the children's perception of the world, how ideologies have started to find its way into literature and in how far these ideologies are traceable or not. This is crucial to take into consideration for the concrete literary analysis in the following chapter.

3.1 Children's Literature – A Question of Definition

All three primary texts *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, *Five Children and It* and *The Railway Children* by the late Victorian author Edith Nesbit are children's novels. Standing in contrast with adult literature, children's literature has its own specificities. It is therefore probably the most sensible idea to give definitions of the concepts discussed in this thesis. To begin with, the issue of children's literature as such needs to be taken into account. Although it seems that the term 'children's literature' speaks for itself, it is advisable to give an explanation. Generally speaking, the most prevailing difference between adult literature and children's literature is the intended audience (Grenby et al. xiii) which is the child-reader (Maybin et al. 1). Grenby et al. (xiii) state that it is markedly difficult to define the child as the target audience as children's literature comprises a whole range of readership such as, for example, the infant who is being read to, an adolescent or simply an adult who is particularly fond of children's books. To this matter, the following has been pointed out:

What children's literature *is* remains an area for continuing debate, centred on the conception of children's literature itself. It is an oddity in being a category defined by its putative and implied consumers. The term

itself appears to be an oxymoron: how can books which are written by adults be appropriately called ‘children’s literature’? (Maybin et al. 3)

Maybin et al. (3) further argue that children’s literature consequently depicts how adults view the world. Indeed, children’s literature mostly presents the world the way adults think that children might process their surroundings. This implies that the texts usually tend to lack authenticity as an adult, even though he or she was once a child, cannot recall in detail the thoughts of a child. The author can only try his and her best by making assumptions in order to render the texts as authentic and believable as possible.

What matters the most in the whole discussion focusing on children’s literature, is the difficulty of giving a concrete definition of the child, or more specifically childhood. Hunt (*Children’s Literature. An illustrated History* ix) states that “[t]he concept of childhood shifts constantly from period to period, place to place, culture to culture – perhaps even from child to child. The literature designed for children is going, therefore, to reflect this variety too.” The complexity of the definition of children’s literature encouraged a lot of scholars to investigate further into the field of juvenile literature. Children’s literature only recently became part of academic studies, dating back to the 1970s. Beforehand, children’s literature was not really taken seriously by scholars, but considered as easy and trivial (Maybin et al. 1). In this context, Mickenberg et al. explain that

[t]he growing attention given to childhood as a category of analysis has infused the academic study of children’s literature with new energy. It has also highlighted the exciting and innovative aspects of children’s literature scholarship, which today benefits from the insights of historians, sociologists, psychologists, media studies scholars, political scientists, and legal scholars, as well as literary critics, education specialists, and library professionals. Focusing on analyses on children’s texts and children’s culture, contemporary scholars are producing theoretically sophisticated, politically engaged, and historicized yet wide-ranging work that marks this field as exceptionally dynamic. (Mickenberg et al. 3)

In addition, it has to be stated that the study of children’s literature encompasses a wide range of genres. Children’s literature does not only limit itself to novels, but includes poetry, nursery rhymes, story-telling, picture books, drama, ballads and even comics (Maybin et al. 4). In this thesis, however, emphasis will be put on the genre of the novel as the literary analysis will focus

on novels. Having discussed the more general aspects of children's literature, I will now focus on the historical component of children's literature with special regard to the Victorian period and early Modernism, which is the time frame in which the three novels by Edith Nesbit were published.

3.2 Juvenile Literature and the Victorian Period

Although the first children's texts came into being during the Renaissance period; that is in the sixteenth century (Piesse 19), these pieces of literature were not yet explicitly written for children. Writing texts for children, as specific target audience, was introduced during the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Hunt, *Children's Literature* 14). In the beginning of the nineteenth century, many children's books were highly instructional and mainly written for a didactic purpose (Townsend 680). The number of published books for children grew enormously in those days and typically "[f]iction stood at a discount to fact and was represented largely by a flow of wishy-washy moral stories which presumably children found acceptable in the absence of anything more stimulating" (680). In the early nineteenth century, England was marked by the Evangelic movement favouring the teaching of Christian beliefs and dogmatic attitudes through Sunday schools and 'reward books' which predominately contained moral input (Briggs et al. 130). In the course of the nineteenth century, the role of children's literature changed significantly which went hand in hand with cultural and societal changes. Population and literacy increased and in the mid-nineteenth century a great number of new juvenile reading materials were published. The majority of these newly published texts still remained didactic (Townsend 680) and unrealistic. For example, the Victorian ideal of childhood was emphasised in so-called 'goody-goody' books, nursery rhymes and old moral tales (Carpenter 10). The period most famously known as First Golden Age of Literature set in during the 1880s with writers such as Charles Kingsley and Lewis Carroll (Townsend 680). The term 'Golden Age' typically refers to the literary period from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) to A.A. Milne (Carpenter, *Preface*). In the mid- and late-nineteenth century many people started to value children and especially childhood much more (Carpenter 18 – 19) which resulted in an improved

attitude towards the child as a reader, including narrative stance address in literature. The child was no longer considered as inferior and weak, but was accepted by the many new writers as peers and equals (Hunt, *Children's Literature. An Anthology* 1801 – 1902 xiii). In addition to the rise of fantasy and the introduction of new genres such as the school story, the adventure story and nonsense poetry, a whole range of picture books were published in the course of the century (Briggs et al. 149 – 161). Children's literature in the late nineteenth century and early Modernism was thus

richly varied, [...] incorporating fairy tale and fantasy, exploring family relationships, ranging in a world in adventures, discussing politics and, most liberatingly, containing moral ambiguity. While it can be argued that it is impossible to write for children without exercising control or didacticism of some kind, that didactic element was generally extremely muted; religious or moral education was, if present at all, implied rather than stated. (Hunt, *Children's Literature. An Anthology* 1801 – 1902 xiii)

In other words, while there was an increase of genres, the didactic component in most texts was more in the background. In addition, mechanical progress offered new possibilities such as colour printing and encouraged many writers to include illustrations and pictures in their literary masterpieces (164). This is also the case in Nesbit's literature, where illustrations are used in order to make the story more interesting and fascinating for the readers. Briggs et al. comment on the new developments in the late nineteenth century as the following:

The quality of [...] illustrators, the establishing of such genres as fantasy and the adventure story, and the development of them by such writers as Lewis Carroll, George McDonald, and Robert Louis Stevenson, demonstrated that children's books had emerged from the nursery and the classroom. (Briggs et al. 165)

Contrary to many early Victorian writers which were often merely instructional, the late nineteenth century writers had the tendency to blur the didactic and the entertaining components in literature. In that way many late nineteenth century writers continued to convey moral messages, beliefs and social norms. However, the majority of writers of the late Victorian period expressed didactic input more covertly in their texts. This is the reason why it is crucial to look more closely at literary texts published in those days in order to detect a writer's ideology. How this can be achieved, which levels of ideology there are and what role the readers play will be considered in the following subsection.

3.3 Ideologies and their effects on Children's Literature

“One of the most useful insights of modern criticism has been that no work, even the most apparently simple book for children, can be innocent of some ideological freight.” (Hunt, *Contemporary Criticism* 18) This quotation wonderfully sets the tone for the debate of ideologies in children's literature and underlines the research question of my thesis. As already outlined in the previous section, most of nineteenth century children's literature was meant to instruct and teach children from young age onwards. The possibility of children's authors to influence children as their primary readership results from an inherent power relationship between adults and children (18). Charles Sarland explains the concept like this:

Since there is an imbalance of power between the children and young people who read the books, and the adults who write, publish, and review the books, or who are otherwise engaged in commentary upon, or dissemination of the books, either as parents, or teachers, or librarians, or booksellers, or academics, there is here immediately a question of politics, a politics first and foremost of age differential. But wider than this, the books themselves and the social practices that surround them will raise ideological issues. (Sarland 4)

In other words, many authors of juvenile literature tend to write their texts by either consciously or subconsciously, directly or indirectly including their personal beliefs, values and moral standards. Child readers³, when reading a literary text, may react differently to the author's values. A writer may encourage a child reader to adopt the writer's beliefs, but a child reader may also ignore the values and beliefs outlined in a text. The child's individual reaction is always dependent on his or her position in society, his or her social surroundings and the child's prior knowledge. This interrelationship between child reader, author and society is complex. The following two examples will therefore help to comprehend the idea better. Let us assume that a politically liberal text is read by a child living in a very conservative household and by another one living in a very liberal home. The text may cause different reactions in the two readers. While the child with politically conservative background may react critically to the text, the politically liberal child may probably show no reaction at all and

³ In this thesis the term 'child reader' refers to young child readers who are more or less naïvely reading literature for pleasure. The term 'analytical reader' is used for readers, mostly adults, who are intentionally analysing literature.

may simply enjoy reading the text for pleasure. To give a further example, a text on multiculturalism may cause different reactions if read by a child living for instance in London and being presumably used to different ethnicities and cultures than if read by a child living in a rural village, who has seldom been in touch with other ethnicities. There is thus a certain interrelation between child reader, author and society which has influence on the child reader's reception of a text and the revelation of ideological input. To reach their target audience, many children's authors therefore tend to draw on their child reader's emotional reaction and their judgement through various literary strategies and devices such as plot, characters, conflicts and resolutions. Furthermore, ideological components may come to the surface naturally (Hunt, *Contemporary Criticism* 18) because "writers for children (like writers for adults) cannot hide what their values are. Even if beliefs are passive and unexamined, and no part of any conscious proselytising, the texture of language and story will reveal them and communicate them." (Hollindale 110) Hollindale thus argues that ideological input in a text simply happens in a writing process which a writer might not even be aware of. In fact, it has to be kept in mind that the explicit definition of the term ideology is twofold.

In a general sense, ideology means the beliefs, concepts, ways of thinking, ideas and values that shape out thoughts and which we use to explain or understand the world. More precisely, we can define ideology as the system of beliefs or ideas of an economic or political system. This second definition takes us towards Marxist criticism where the term ideology is central. Marxists argue that in any period human understanding is constructed by ideology. (Peck et al. 157)

In this thesis, the term ideology will refer to Edith Nesbit's general social beliefs and norms as well as her political values and attitudes. Having defined the main concepts, it is now crucial to examine how ideology can manifest itself in literature and how it can be detected by the analytical reader. The following assumptions serve as a guideline for the literary analysis in this thesis.

3.3.1 Levels of ideology

According to Peter Hollindale (108) there may be three different ways of how ideology can manifest itself in children's literature. First of all an author of a text

may integrate his or her subjective beliefs, which can be social, political and moral. In this way the author may deliberately and consciously include the ideological components in his or her text. This might facilitate the detection of ideology for both, the analytical reader and the child reader. Through consciously integrating ideological components into the literary texts, an author may intend to raise awareness in the reader with regard to specific topics, such as for example sexual stereotypes, gender roles, race and gender, and he or she may allude to new ideas which may be non-conformist and revolutionary. The second way of integrating ideology into a text is circuitous (108 – 109). Hollindale explains that “[t]he more gifted the writer, the more likely to do so. If the fictional world is fully imagined and realized it may carry its ideological burden more covertly showing things as they are but trusting to literary organization rather than explicitly didactic guidelines to achieve moral effect.” (109) The third strategy is marked by passivity. A text may incorporate the author’s implied and unexamined assumptions. In that sense ideology is reflected unconsciously in literature. There is a tendency to consider this level of ideology less valuable, but it has been stated that

the values at stake are usually those which are taken for granted by the writer, and reflect the writer’s integration in a society which unthinkingly accepts them. In turn this means that children, unless they are helped to notice what is there, will take them for granted too. Unexamined, passive values are widely *shared* values, and we should not underestimate the powers of reinforcement vested in quiescent and unconscious ideology. (Hollindale 110)

Sometimes, these passive ideological assumptions are contradictory to the overtly presented ones (111). The analytical reader therefore needs to pay special attention when trying to reveal the author’s ideology in the texts. In addition to the three levels presented above, the world, life and surroundings of the writer shape his or her values and beliefs. This means that the author writes a text by reflecting his or her own experiences of life (112). Hollindale states that “[a]s a rule, writers for children are transmitters not of themselves uniquely, but of the worlds they share.” (112) All ideological implications, being overt, passive or unconscious, are dependent on the understanding and skills of the reader, who plays, and I assume it is quite legitimate to say, the utmost importance in the whole discussion. As already pointed out in the previous section, there is always a certain interrelation between reader, author and

society influencing the revelation of ideology in a text. The following section will more specifically take into account the role of the reader.

3.3.2 *The role of the reader*

The reader who purchases literature, reads texts for pleasure or analyses them plays an as equally important role as the author of a text when it comes to ideology. In fact ideological components can only come to the surface if texts are read and analysed appropriately. Ideology is not a concept with which the children's minds are filled with without any form of reflection and processing. Children are already equipped with prior-knowledge of the world (Hollindale 114) and are able to process those bits and pieces of input that are relevant for their current situation. However, it has to be kept in mind that in many cases adults are responsible for making children aware of the implied ideological components in a text and help them locate and detect them. This can be a quite a challenge for both - adults and children. This is why Hollindale provides a list, in the first place addressed to teachers. This list might be useful when examining and analysing a writer's beliefs and values. Additionally the list can help to develop a child's reading abilities. First of all, Hollindale (116- 118) encourages the analytical reader to investigate whether a text has been transposed or reversed and whether a text is asserting and thereby attacking principles and symptoms. Furthermore, he states that it is advisable to

[c]onsider the dénouements of some books, and the happy (or unhappy) ending. Does the happy ending of a novel amount to a 'contract of reaffirmation' of questionable values which have earlier seemed to be on a trial? Is the conclusion imaginatively coherent, or does it depend on implicit assumptions which are at odds with the surface ideology? Are there any loose ends (not so much of plot but of thought and feeling)? (Hollindale 117)

Thirdly, virtues and vices can be examined. The analytical reader may ask him- or herself whether they are logically connected or not. Furthermore, values may be presented as a whole 'package' in which separate items interlock. Hollindale (116 – 118) especially draws focus on the role of the characters and encourages the analytical reader to ask him- or herself the following questions:

Are desirable values associated with niceness of character, and vice versa? Is it really true that a given attractive philosophy or action could not believably be held or performed by someone whose character was in other ways unpleasant? How much allowance is there [...] for inconsistency, or for dissonance between ideology and temperament? How far is a book's ideology conveyed by 'moral symmetry' in character delineation? (Hollindale 117)

The reader can additionally analyse the choices a character makes in a text. These choices can be linked to values, behaviour and loyalties. An analytical reader may ask the question: "[D]oes the plot hinge merely on a predetermined choice, and interest depend on whether or not it is successfully carried out?" (118) In addition, Hollindale alludes to the roles of characters. The reader can examine whether characters belong to certain subcultures and groups such as school and family but also "race, culture, religion, political affiliation and social custom." (118) Furthermore, some characters may be absent in a story. Hollindale explains that

[o]mission takes many forms: for example, the performance of important life-supporting tasks for children without any reference to the workers (such as mothers) who carry them out. Invisibility may take many forms, for example the denial of names, the identification of people by what they do rather than what they are, and the absorption of individuals into social and racial groups. (Hollindale 118)

The list by Hollindale can function as a guideline when analysing a text in terms of ideology. In the literary analysis some of the points mentioned above will be integrated, for example the aspect of absent characters or that of subcultures. Furthermore, identifying the implied reader of a text may help the analytical reader to reveal an author's ideology. This means that a writer of a text is creating an ideologically constructed reader, a so-called implied reader (Sarland 50). The writer imagines an intended readership and creates a second self which achieves agreement between him- or herself and the reader (Chambers 355). Chambers explains that

for example, [the author] puts himself into the narrator – whether that be a third-person godlike all-seer or a first-person child character; by the way he comments on the events in the story; and by the attitude he adopts towards his characters and their actions, which he communicates in various ways, both subtle and obvious. In the same way [...] the reader's second self – the reader-in-the-book – is given certain attributes, a certain persona, created by techniques and devices which help form a

narrative. And this persona is guided by the author towards the book's potential meanings. (Chambers 356)

Iser (xii - xiv) additionally emphasises the active participation of the implied reader in a reading process. This means that texts only gain meaning through the implied reader's discovery, his or her establishment of a link between thought and perception and through consistency-building. This thesis, however, will be based on Chambers' definition. Chambers even mentions various devices and strategies an author may make use of in order to highlight his or her beliefs and values. Chambers enumerates the devices *style*, *point of view*, *taking sides* and *tell-tale gaps* (Chambers 357 – 365). Style refers to the language the author may use to convey his or her message in a text. This includes primarily aspects such as choice of vocabulary, use of image, sentence structure and tone. These choices made by the writer might help to convey the writer's attitude to customs, beliefs and characters in the text (357). A clear relationship between author and reader is established through the tone of a text (360) as well as through the point of view. Chambers points out that "authors tend to reinforce the relationship by adopting in their second self – giving the book [...] a very sharply focused point of view." (361) Typically children's texts centre on a child through whose eyes the story is revealed. The point of view in children's literature is most commonly that of a child. The child narrator "works powerfully as a solvent, melting away a child's non-literary approach to reading and reforming him into the kind of reader the book demands." (361) Furthermore, the author has a choice whether to take sides with the implied reader or to distance him- or herself completely. By the writer's right choice the conveyance of an intended message as well as a successful negotiation between reader and writer may be achieved (362 – 364). The final strategy mentioned by Chambers is the tell-tale gap. An author can knowingly leave out certain pieces of information to make the story more dramatic. Sometimes these gaps simply happen in the course of the author's writing progress. This means that the gaps are unintentional and the writer might not even be aware of them. These gaps are known as so-called referential gaps and are assumptions of commonality (365). Chambers explains that

we can [...] detect from a writer's references to a variety of things just what he assumes about his implied reader's beliefs, politics, social customs, and the like. Richmal Crompton in common with Enid Blyton,

A.A. Milne, Edith Nesbit and many more children's authors assumed a reader who would not only be aware of housemaids and cooks, nannies and gardeners but would also be used to living in homes attended by such as household servants. That assumption was as unconsciously made as the adoption of a tone of voice current among people who employed servants at the time the authors were writing. (Chambers 365)

All of the techniques and strategies which have been outlined above, help to build a relationship between author and child reader. These devices may encourage the child reader to identify with the protagonists. Through this identification process the child reader might get more involved in the story and might value the text more. In fact, child readers may respond to a certain text in three ways. The reader can either ignore the underlying ideologies completely or he or she might simply assume the ideology. Thirdly, he or she might intentionally analyse the text in detail by questioning the author's attitudes and values (Sarland 51). While the first two types of readers are merely reading for pleasure, the third type of readers may be referred to as analytical reader. When analysing a text with regard to ideology, the interrelationship between author, readers and society need to be taken into consideration. It is therefore not possible to give an explicit statement of whether a text's ideological components have been successfully conveyed to and understood by a child reader. Some of the literary devices to detect ideology in a text, such as language and style, point of view and characterisation, will be part of the literary analysis of Edith Nesbit's novels *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, *The Railway Children* and *Five Children and It*.

4. SOCIAL DIDACTICISM IN THE RAILWAY CHILDREN, FIVE CHILDREN AND IT AND THE STORY OF THE TREASURE SEEKERS

Having discussed the theoretical background, including societal, political and economic aspects of the nineteenth century, as well as literary theory with specific reference to the role of ideology in children's literature in the previous two chapters, this chapter will focus on the literary analysis of Edith Nesbit's children's novels *The Railway Children* (1906), *Five Children and It* (1902) and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899). Special emphasis will be put on social didacticism and Nesbit's political engagement, her social values and beliefs. Before carrying out the concrete literary analysis of the three novels which will be divided into various subsections, I will take into consideration Edith Nesbit as person and writer. The biographic information is essential for the literary analysis because it will help the reader to understand certain aspects, for instance the choice of her characters.

4.1 Edith Nesbit – A Woman out of the Norm

Knowing a writer and his or her life story is always a good starting point when trying to analyse his or her writing. Writers often reflect their experiences and rework them in their literary texts. This is especially true for Edith Nesbit, a woman with "strong individualism from her childhood to her death." (Smith 153) Only three years after her birth in London in 1858, Edith Nesbit's father passed away and left behind Nesbit's mother and her five siblings, of which Edith was the youngest. The children were from then onwards brought up by Edith's mother who continued to run her dead husband's Agricultural College (Carpenter 126). After Edith's education in various boarding schools (Carpenter 127), she met Hubert Bland for the first time in 1877. She was 19 years old and immediately fell in love with him (Briggs, *Edith Nesbit* 55 – 56). Julia Briggs characterises Hubert Bland as the following:

Bland had a quick and eager intelligence, and an analytical, if strongly prejudiced mind. He had made the most of his education at various local schools, but with no connections or financial backing, he had been obliged to take a tedious job as a bank clerk. Always a keen reader and thinker, he had naturally been interested in meetings of social protest

organized [...] by various communist and socialist groups. At these he had met figures such as the young Eleanor Marx, and Henry M. Hyndman, leader of the Social Democratic Federation. Bland was very much the type of disaffected young intellectual whose eagerness to change the world through political action reflected, in part at least, his own lack of opportunities. (Briggs, *Edith Nesbit* 56 – 57)

Hubert Bland was very much involved in the socialist movement of the 1880s and was founder member of the Fabian Society (Carpenter 127). In 1884 Edith Nesbit joined the Fabian Society too (Briggs, *Edith Nesbit* 81) and she “was elected to the Pamphlets Committee, no doubt because of her literary experience”. (81) In fact, Edith Nesbit already started to write before she met Hubert. In order to make money, she sold her poetry (Carpenter 127); an experience that she later integrated into her *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*. With the rise of the Fabian Society, Nesbit started to collaborate with Hubert and together they wrote two novels and some short stories such as *Grim Tales* (1893) (Carpenter 132). In the late 1880s Hubert started to focus more on political journalism and Nesbit returned to fiction (Briggs, *Edith Nesbit* 87). With Nesbit’s political engagement in the Fabian Society, she took the chance to reveal her rebellious and unconventional side. Briggs points out that “[n]ow, through her Fabian friends, she began to discover a new role for herself, one that was altogether better suited to an active woman of character and independence.” (84) For example, Edith smoked in public, cut her hair short and advocated the Baconian theory, according to which Bacon is said to have written Shakespeare (Carpenter 128). Most of all, however, Edith Nesbit was known for her literary success and her numerous publications of children’s as well as adult’s texts and poems. The most famous children’s novels written by Nesbit are *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), *The Red House* (1902), *Five Children and It* (1902), *The Railway Children* (1906), *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), *The House of Arden* (1908) as well as *The Magic City* (1910). For this thesis, it is of the utmost importance to keep in mind that Edith Nesbit was extremely close to the socialist movement, especially because of her socially activist husband Hubert Bland. In conclusion, Edith was quite an unconventional personality who was said to have lived a very Bohemian life.

4.2 Social Didacticism – A Definition

As already outlined in Chapter Two of this thesis, ideologies play an important role in literature, and even more specifically in children's literature. These ideological aspects, often linked to complex social problems, might shape children's understanding and ideas about the past, the future and the present (Reynolds 191). The term 'social didacticism' contains two words 'social' and 'didacticism'. Many literary texts are considered as inherently didactic because the adult writers write the texts for the children with the aim to do them good. This means that the writers construct their texts according to their own values and beliefs. However, many writers tend to deny the didactic components of the texts, but even those writers let their texts influence from their personal world views and from what they consider as wrong or right (Hunt *Instruction and Delight*, 14). In this thesis the term 'didacticism' in literature refers to the writer's unaware as well as intentional influence on children's thinking, their beliefs and attitudes. The term 'social' refers to the moral and social values as well as to the political beliefs. Social didacticism thus implies that the writer – overtly or covertly – incorporates his or her own social and political beliefs in the literary texts. A more detailed explanation is provided by Reynolds who states that

[s]ince its earliest beginnings, children's literature has been used by authors to influence young readers to adopt those attitudes and that behaviour considered in any period to be desirable. Didacticism has never been confined to helping readers to accumulate factual knowledge; rather, books have commonly also been used in the attempt to inculcate acceptable morals and ethics. (Reynolds 192)

In fact, the majority of literary texts have always been used to communicate social norms and appropriate behaviour to a more or less obvious extent. Reynolds explains that there is a whole range of narrative techniques, which have already been enumerated and explained in detail in Chapter Two of this thesis - including aspects such as characterisation, intertextuality, point of view and narration which can reflect the writer's attitudes, beliefs and values (192 – 193). In this diploma thesis the term 'social didacticism' designates the adult writer's influence on the child reader with regard to accepted social and political beliefs.

4.3 *The Railway Children, Five Children and It* and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*

This section comprises the literary analysis of Edith Nesbit's children's novels *The Railway Children* (1906), *Five Children and It* (1902) and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899) and constitutes the core of this thesis. The analysis will be carried out with special reference to social didacticism and Edith Nesbit's political engagement, her social values and beliefs. As the research question of this thesis is the same for all three primary texts, the literary analysis will be carried out for all three novels at the same time. To recap, the research question of this thesis is concerned with the Nesbit's political engagement. This thesis tries to investigate in how far Nesbit's literature has been influenced by her participation in the socialist movement, and more specifically in the Fabian Society. Analysing all three texts simultaneously will make a comparison and a final conclusion easier. To start off, a brief overview of the novels' plots will be given.

The first primary text of this diploma thesis is *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*. The novel was published in 1899 and is the first one of the Bastables' trilogy, followed by *The Wouldbegoods* in 1901 and *The New Treasure Seekers* in 1904. The story is about six children who are living with their father, whose business just recently crashed, in a semi-detached house in Lewisham Road, London. All six children, Dora, Oswald, Dicky, Alice, Noël and Horace Octavius (H.O.), are trying to restore the fallen family fortunes. For example, they are selling poetry, digging for treasure and playing detectives. The most prominent and most remarkable feature of the book is the narrative technique applied by Nesbit. Nesbit uses Oswald, one of the main protagonists of the text, to narrate the story. However, he remains disguised until the end of the novel which allows him a child's as well as an adult's voice. The second text discussed in this thesis is *Five Children and It*. The novel was published in 1902. Nesbit continued the story in *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1903) and the *The Story of the Amulet* (1906). As the title of the book already indicates, there are five child protagonists: Robert, Anthea (also known as Panther), Jane (also called Pussy) and the baby Cyril, who is casually referred to as the Lamb. The family has just moved from London to the countryside into the "White House". When exploring

their surroundings, they dig in a gravel-pit and discover the fantastic, but extremely grumpy, sand-fairy Psammead. The sand-fairy is able to grant a wish every day lasting until sunset. This brings the children into a lot of trouble as all wishes go wrong in the end. For example, when the children wish for jewellery, they get involved into robbery. Then, they wish the baby to grow up faster until it turns into a giant. The third text *The Railway Children* was published in 1906. When their father is imprisoned and accused of espionage, the three siblings Roberta, Peter, Phyllis and their mother, who is an enthusiastic writer, move to a small village in the countryside. The children's favourite occupation is watching the trains at the nearby railway station. They get to know a lot of new people, including an Old Gentleman and a Russian exile. They befriend railway workers and learn new things about the trains as well as the railway, but most of the time the three children hope for their Father to get back home soon and above all, safely. In the end of the novel, Father indeed returns home and the family's balance is re-established.

The following chapter comprises the literary analysis of the three primary texts *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, *Five Children and It* and *The Railway Children* by Edith Nesbit. The novels will be examined with regard to social didacticism. This means that I will try to find out to what extent Nesbit's political as well as social values and beliefs become visible in her texts. In this context a great number of questions will pop up. For example, why did Nesbit choose children as main characters although the addressed readership was not only children but also adults? Why did Nesbit use one of her characters in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* to narrate the story? What role do aspects such as poverty, magic and community play in the novels? Why is the absent father such an important metaphor in the *The Railway Children* and why can the servants in *Five Children and It* not see the effects of the children's wishes? Based on the underlying research question of this thesis, these, among other questions, will be raised and answered in the following literary analysis.

4.3.1 Point of View and Narrative Technique

This section will take into account the narrative modes as well as the points of view in all three novels *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, *Five Children and It* and *The Railway Children*. The term narration “involves the showing or telling of [...] events [in a story]” (Cobley 237) and typically includes a narrator and a narratee. The narrator of a story, or the narrative voice, tells the story events. There are various forms of narrators. There can be either first or third person narrators and sometimes the narrator can even take part in the story as a character (237). The term ‘narratee’ refers to the ideal readers of the story (236 – 237). The most important aspect is to keep in mind that author and narrator are not necessarily the same. The author’s task is to produce and organise the narrative (240) by creating an appropriate narrator for the story. The author of a story additionally chooses from a number of points of view. Turner distinguishes between four different points of view: omniscient, limited omniscient, objective as well as first person point of view (Turner 44). Omniscient point of view is god-like (Cobley 238) meaning that the reader is given insight into the thoughts and feelings of all characters. Everything is known and revealed by the narrator (Turner 44). Limited omniscient point of view presents the story through the eyes of one specific character. Typically the third person singular ‘he’ or ‘she’ is used. The reader is only given insight into one specific character and sees the events through the eyes of the character (45). First person point of view is restricted to one person too, however, the first person singular pronoun ‘I’ is used. This technique might give the reader the impression of dealing with an autobiography as the story is presented first-hand and therefore seems more credible. If the reader does not get any insight into any characters, the point of view is objective. Typically used in a play, this point of view reveals thoughts and feelings through the character’s actions. This requires the reader’s ability to read between the lines (46). The terminology provided by Cobley and Turner will be used for the analysis of narrative technique and point of view in this diploma thesis.

The most interesting text, of all three texts, with regard to narration and point of view is Nesbit’s *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*. Townsend points out that “[i]n creating Oswald, Nesbit surely showed a touch of genius.” (Townsend,

Written for Children 104) This is mainly because Oswald is telling the story but does not explicitly say that he is the narrator of the story. He is, as outlined above, a narrator who is taking part in the story (Cobley 237). At the beginning of the novel Oswald states that “[i]t is one of us that tells this story – but I shall not tell you which: only at the very end perhaps I will.” (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 11) Even though Oswald does not intend to reveal the narrator of the story, “it is obvious that it is Oswald who is telling the story from the number of puffs and the amount of self-congratulation that he manages to get in”. (Townsend, *Written for Children* 104) For example, Oswald praises his “extraordinary presence of mind” (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 40) and emphasises that “he is too much of a man to quarrel about a little thing” (34) and that “he is much cleverer than some people.” (37) The shift of pronouns indicates that Oswald does not manage to remain anonymous. Although Oswald “refers to [himself] in the third person” (Townsend, *Written for Children* 104) he constantly changes from the first person singular ‘I’ to the first person plural ‘we’. Oswald’s inconsistency in terms of use of pronouns becomes already obvious at the beginning of the novel when Oswald introduces the protagonists to the reader:

We [emphasis added] are the Bastables. There are six of us besides Father. Our Mother is dead, and if you think we don’t care because I don’t tell you much about her you only show that you do not understand people at all. Dora is the eldest. Then Oswald – and then Dicky. Oswald won the Latin prize at his preparatory school – and Dicky is good at sums. Alice and Noël are twins: they are ten, and Horace Octavius is *my* [emphasis added] youngest brother. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 10)

In the first place the narrator uses the personal pronoun ‘we’ to tell the story, however, Oswald commonly slips into the habit of using the pronoun ‘I’, for example, he says “I am afraid there is a great deal of crying in this chapter, but I can’t help it.” (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 156) The point of view chosen by Nesbit is thus first person point of view. The story is revealed through the eyes of Oswald who is using first person pronouns to narrate the story. Interestingly, Oswald is incorporating an adult’s as well as a child’s voice. Briggs explains that

[t]he effect of this ingenious strategy is to produce two simultaneous viewpoints, that of the child and the adult, thus solving the difficult

problem of self-positioning confronted by the adult talking to the child. It is a happy device to have Oswald try out his own narrative in the various different literary styles with which he is familiar, as if searching to identify the nature of the story he occupies: the narrator can thus convey the child's point of view with all the immediacy and lack of perspective that implies. (Briggs, *Transitions* 175)

The adult's voice becomes most obvious when Oswald is instructing the readership by commenting on his own behaviour and that of others. For example, Oswald explains to the reader that "[y]ou do not notice your general fortune so much, as long as you have money in your pocket. This is why so many children with regular pocket-money have never felt it their duty to seek for treasure." (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 143) It is quite logical that Oswald, as he himself is a child, is given a child's voice. Clearly the child reader can identify more easily with the protagonists as the relationship between reader and narrator is much closer. The mystery of the narrator's identity is revealed nearly at the end of the novel when the children meet the Indian Uncle:

I could have gone on much longer, but he interrupted me to say –
 'Upon my word! And what's *your* name, eh?'
 'Oswald Bastable,' I said; and I do hope you people who are reading this story have not guessed before that I was Oswald all the time. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 220)

The fact that the narrator is also a main character contributes to the credibility of the novel. Another particularity of the novel is Nesbit's use of the intrusive narrator, a term which has not been explained yet. Using phrases such as "dear reader" the intrusive narrator directly addresses the implied reader, who is the idealised and imagined reader by the author (Cobley 234 – 235). Nesbit followed the nineteenth century fashion as the use of intrusive narrators was very popular among Victorian novelists such as George Eliot (108). In *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* the intrusive narrator for instance states, "Gentle reader, I will not conceal from you what Oswald did." (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 175). To give another example, in Chapter Seven, when the children decide to become bandits, the narrator states "[y]ou may think we had no chains, but you are wrong, because we used to keep two other dogs once, besides Pincher." (83) This quotation including the second person plural 'you' as form of address brings up the aspect of the implied or addressed reader. In *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* the addressed readership is twofold. On the

one hand the children are implied readers as they are even directly addressed: “And if any of you kids who read this ever had two such adventures in one night you can just write and tell me. That’s all.” (200) The following quotation confirms this assumption:

O reader, have you ever been playing Red Indians in blankets round a bedroom fire in a house where you thought there was no one but you – and the suddenly heard a noise like a chair, and a fire being poked, downstairs? Unless you have you will not be able to imagine at all what it feels like. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 182)

On the other hand the implied reader also includes adults. During the nineteenth century it was common usage, especially for mothers and nannies, to read out stories to their children. From this historical fact it can be derived that the readership presumably also included adults. Additionally it is known that *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, among other novels written by Nesbit, appeared in the *Strand*, a magazine read by both, children and adults (Gubar 138). Gubar thus supports the assumption that the novel is addressed to adults as well. She even states that in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* “Nesbit frequently pokes fun at her child characters for the benefit of the adults in her audience. For example, when the Editor turns his back to the boys after reading one of the poems, adult readers are expected to guess that he is laughing.” (138) In other words, Nesbit includes a notion of irony into her texts which renders the text extremely humorous and amusing for her adult readership. However, the narrator also draws a very comical picture of the adults which understandably makes it difficult to consider the text as being addressed to adults as well. For example, the narrator states, “I don’t know how it is, but having to consult about a thing with grown-up people, even the bravest and the best, seems to make the thing not worth doing afterwards.” (159) The quotation illustrates that the narrator is taking on a child perspective. All in all the narrative technique and point of view applied by Edith Nesbit achieves that characters, writer and readers are put on equal level. This power equality makes it easier to transfer social norms and ideological thinking to Nesbit’s readers. The choice of the child narrator, who is partly taking on an adult role, manages to gain the reader’s trust and makes him more reliable.

The narrative technique applied in *Five Children and It* and *The Railway Children* is quite similar. In both novels Nesbit uses limited omniscient narration and the third person plural 'they'. The use of the intrusive narrator plays an important role in both novels too. The beginning of *The Railway Children* illustrates the above:

They were not railway children to begin with. I don't suppose they had ever thought about railways except as means of getting to Maskelyne and Cooke's, the pantomime, Zoological Gardens, and Madame Tussaud's. They were just ordinary suburban children, and they lived with their father and mother in an ordinary red-brick-fronted villa, with coloured glass in the front door, a tiled passage that was called the hall, a bathroom with hot and cold water, electric bells, French windows, and a good deal of white paint, and 'every modern convenience', as the house-agents say. There were three of them. Roberta was the eldest. Of course, mothers never have their favourites, but if their mother *had* had a favourite, it might have been Roberta. Next came Peter, who wished to be an engineer when he grew up; and the youngest was Phyllis, who meant extremely well. (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 13)

The intrusive narrator guides the reader through the story by giving him or her background information about the different places the children have already been to. In addition to the guiding purpose, the intrusive narrator instructs the readers. In Chapter Nine of *The Railway Children*, when Perks gets angry because the children have collected gifts for Perk's birthday, the narrator states, "[s]o you see it was all right in the end. But if one does that sort of thing, one has to be careful to do it in the right way. For, as Mr Perks said, when he had time to think it over, it's not so much what you do, as what you mean." (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 182) The most illustrative example of the intrusive narrator is the last passage at the end of the story, when the children are reunited with their father:

He goes in and the door is shut. I think we will not open the door or follow him. I think that just now we are not wanted there. I think it will be best for us to go quickly and quietly away. At the end of the field, among the thin gold spikes of grass and the harebells and gypsy roses and St. John's wort, we may just take one last look, over our shoulders, at the white house where neither we nor anyone else is wanted now. (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 270)

By using the intrusive narrator, Nesbit gives the reader the feeling that he or she is, together with her help, creating the story. Looking at *Five Children and It*, it becomes obvious that the reader is more focused on than in *The Railway*

Children. There is hardly any direct address to the reader in *The Railway Children*. The ones that are present in the text are put into brackets and therefore seem less significant. For instance, when Bobbie complains about failing to be a good child, the direct address goes as the following: “(The Gentle Reader may perhaps have suffered from this difficulty)” (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 194) In contrast to *The Railway Children*, intrusive narrator directly addresses the child reader on a regular basis in *Five Children and It*:

Now that I have begun to tell you about the place, I feel that I could go on and make this into a most interesting story about all the ordinary things that the children did – just the kind of things you do yourself, you know – and you would believe every word of it; and when I told about the children’s being tiresome, as you are sometimes, your aunts would perhaps write in the margin of the story with a pencil, ‘How true!’ or ‘How like life!’ and you would see it and very likely be annoyed. So I will only tell you the really astonishing things that happened and you may leave the book about quite safely, for no aunts and uncles either are likely to write ‘How true!’ on the edge of the story. Grown-up people find it very difficult to believe really wonderful things, unless they have what they call proof. But children will believe almost anything, and grown-ups know this. (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 5)

When looking more closely at the quotation above, including utterances such as “and you would believe every word” (5), it is noticeable that Nesbit seems to be aware of the narrator’s ability to instruct and teach her readers. Therefore, it is no wonder that in *Five Children and It* a whole range of instructive comments are made by the intrusive narrator. The narrator even admits his instructiveness. When the children discuss their wishes, it is narrated that

[i]f you had been there you could not possibly have made head or tail of the talk, but these children were used to talking ‘by fours’, as soldiers march, and each of them could say what it had to say quite comfortably, and listen to the agreeable sound of its own voice, and at the same time have three-quarters of two sharp ears to spare for listening to what the others said. That is an easy example in multiplication of vulgar fractions, but, as I daresay you can’t do even that, I won’t ask you to tell me whether $\frac{3}{4} \times 2 = 1\frac{1}{2}$, but I will ask you to believe me that this was the amount of ear each child was able to lend to the others. Lending ears was common in Roman times, as we learn from Shakespeare; *but I fear I am getting too instructive* [emphasis added]. (Nesbit, *Five Children and It*, 59 -60)

The quotation proves that the didactic elements have been consciously applied by the author and underlines the fact that Nesbit intentionally exercises her power as writer. However, the quotation is also characterised by Nesbit’s use of

irony. On the one hand irony makes the humorous to her readers; on the other hand it might be assumed that Nesbit maybe mocked the typical didactic conventions of the early and mid-nineteenth century children's literature. In addition, the narrator of *Five Children and It* sometimes takes sides with the protagonists and excuses their actions. This makes the narrator even more amiable for the readers and consequently more trustworthy. For example, when the four children, after having grown wings, fly into the clergyman's house and steal some food, the narrator explains:

I cannot pretend that stealing is right. I can only say that on this occasion it did not look like stealing to the hungry four, but appeared in the light of a fair and reasonable business transaction. They had never happened to learn that a tongue – hardly cut into – a chicken and a half, a loaf of bread, and a siphon of soda-water cannot be bought in shops for half-a-crown. (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 104)

Having analysed all three novels with regard to point of view and narrative technique it can be stated that all texts are written in such a way that they offer the possibility to instruct the readership and convey the author's values and beliefs. While Nesbit chose limited omniscient narration for *Five Children and It* and *The Railway Children*, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* is made up by first person narration, revealing the story through the eyes of Oswald, one of the main characters in the novel. All three novels include a primarily instructive intrusive narrator who is occasionally stepping into the story and commenting on the child protagonist's actions. Through the narrative technique chosen by Nesbit, she skilfully creates a tight link between reader, narrator, author and characters. The story is rendered more believable and as the children can identify more easily with the characters, achieved through Nesbit's narrative mode, they are probably more likely to reflect upon and process the given information. Although Nesbit has led grounds by her narrative technique to instruct her reader, it has to be remembered that the success of a writer always depends on the individual reader and on what he or she finally makes out of the story provided by the writer. Some children might get easily involved into the story by Nesbit's personal address and her stepping into the story; some might find her narration tedious and rather annoying. However, it can definitely be pointed out that Nesbit must have had in mind to instruct her readers through the narrator's comments in the texts. The intrusive narrator in *Five Children and*

it even admits his didacticism which reflects Nesbit's intentions and emphasises the underlying assumptions that Nesbit indeed incorporated her political and social values into her literature.

4.3.2 Language and Style

This part of the thesis will be concerned with language and style of the three novels. In the scope of sociolinguistics, one distinguishes between distinct social dialects. This basically means that members of various social classes use specific language variation (Romaine 64). The use of language can consequently indicate the social status of a speaker as well as his or her educational background. Nesbit makes use of this linguistic phenomenon to mark social differences of her characters in the novels. Smith points out that in Nesbit's novels "[t]he children's own perspective about what it means to be poor is forgivable naive, yet E. Nesbit herself makes invidious distinctions between them and the lower-class characters they meet. The really poor people and inevitably the villainous ones speak broken or Cockney English." (Smith 155) Cockney English is an English dialect which is spoken mostly in the East of London. In the past Cockney English was associated with the working classes and the criminals. The dialect was used by criminals because hardly anyone was able to understand the language variation. This facilitated the communication between the criminals. As a result Cockney was associated with the uneducated working class members and considered vulgar and inferior to other English dialects such as Standard English and Received Pronunciation (Rusch 3).

In *The Railway Children* Nesbit uses slangy dialect (Smith 155) for all her working class characters. Perks, the porter of the railway station, is the first character to be mentioned in this context. The following passage illustrates Perk's use of language:

It was on this day that the children first noticed that all engines are not alike. 'Alike?' said the porter whose name was Perks, 'lot love you, no, miss. No more alike nor what you an' me are. That little un without a tender as went by just now all on her own, that was a tank, that was – she's off to do some shunting t' other side o' Maidbridge. That's as it

might be you, miss. Then there's goods engines, great, strong things with three wheels each side – joined with rods to strengthen 'em – as it might be me. Then there's mainline engines as it might be this 'ere young gentleman when he grows up and wins all the races at 'is school – so he will. The mainline engine she's built for speed as well as power. That's one to the 9.15 up.' (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 74)

Perk's speech is marked by the use of sloppy syntax, grammar and pronunciation. Nesbit's use of apostrophes indicates the slangy pronunciation. Furthermore, there is a common usage of double negation and a tendency towards a slangy vocabulary. For example the fireman, who is saving Roberta in Chapter Four, refers to her as "naughty little gell" (87). Another representative character is the bargee Bill, who gets extremely furious in Chapter Eight when he finds the children fishing in the canal:

[The bargee] made one spring up the bank, and caught Peter by the leg, dragged him down – set him on his feet with a shake, took him by the ear – and said sternly – 'Now, then, what do you mean by it? Don't you know these 'ere waters is preserved? You ain't no right catching fish 'ere – not to say nothing of your precious cheek.' (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 150)

Noimann (377) states that the bargee Bill and his wife are originally Irish because Bill's wife sings an Irish song about Bill Bailey to reflect her own situation and makes use of Irish prejudices by describing Bill's wife as "red-haired" (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 154) and Bill as "red-faced, heavy, and beefy." (150) In this case Nesbit alludes to the regional and social differences at the same time. The use of different varieties of English to highlight class differences in the novel becomes even more obvious when comparing Perk's and Bill's speech to that of the doctor who seems to make use of a more sophisticated language and style although "[h]e [is] rather poor himself." (79). A good example for the doctor's use of language is when he explains the term 'engineering' to Bobbie:

'Ah, there are different sorts of engineering – making roads and bridges and tunnels is one kind. And making fortifications is another. Well, we must be turning back, And, remember, you aren't to worry about doctor's bills or you'll be ill yourself, and then I'll send you in a bill as long as the aqueduct.' (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 80)

The doctor, as opposed to Perks, the fireman and the bargee, uses Standard English. His speech is marked by a more sophisticated vocabulary, using words such as "fortification", and by a prescriptively correct sentence structure. In fact

this is true for all main protagonists of the three novels. All main child characters use Standard English in terms of vocabulary, syntax and grammatical structure. The reason for this is the educational background. As pointed out in Chapter One of this thesis, middle class children had the privilege to receive education. In the novel the children's high degree of literacy as well as their knowledge of languages underlines the fact that the main protagonists are well-educated. When the children in *The Railway Children* meet the Russian exile for the first time, the issue of language is brought up:

Then came a voice that thrilled the children through and through. For it spoke in a foreign language. And, what is more, it was a language that they had never heard. They had heard French spoken and German. Aunt Emma knew German, and used to sing a song about *bedeuten* and *zeiten* and *bin* and *sin*. Nor was it Latin. Peter had been in Latin for four terms. It was some comfort, anyhow, to find that none of the crowd understood the foreign language any better than the children did. (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 96 – 97)

The quotation above shows that Peter has attended a school, presumably a grammar school where classic education in Latin was playing a crucial role (Roberts 71). Additionally, it can be derived from the quote that the girls were educated as well. It can only be guessed that their aunt was partly responsible for their education. In fact Nesbit contrasts the children's educational background with that of the people at the railway station including the railway master, a farmer-man and other travellers. As no one at the station is able to communicate with the man, it is finally decided to bring him to the children's mother, who is speaking French. By contrasting the educated middle class children with the unknowing working class railway workers, Nesbit emphasises the educational differences among the various social classes of British society. Although the scene seems very humorous, when reading between the lines the reader remarks a critique on the British societal structure and all its implications with special reference to education.

Compared to *The Railway Children*, language and style play a less important role in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *Five Children and It*. In *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* the burglar, who is breaking into the kitchen of the Bastables, is using a Cockney dialect. When the siblings Dicky and Oswald find the robber in their kitchen, he utters: “All right, governor! Stow that scent

sprinkler. I'll give in. Blowed if I ain't pretty well sick of the job, anyway.'" (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 192) In *Five Children and It* the Gypsies, who are keen on taking care of the Lamp, speak Cockney English: "'Now young uns,' the red-handkerchief man said, 'it's time you were laying of your heads on your pillowses – so it is! The kid's all right and friendly with us now – so you just hand him over and sling that hook o' yours like you said.'" (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 78) Nesbit labels the "under class", those members of the nineteenth century British society below the working classes such as prostitutes and criminals (Landow), by using a different language variation. In all three novels there is thus a clear linguistic separation between the various class members which makes the reader aware of the societal hierarchy in the nineteenth century. Through the linguistic differences, the reader notices rapidly the educational differences between the working and middle classes. It can therefore be assumed that Nesbit is covertly didactic. She raises awareness in the reader and encourages him or her to reflect upon the societal structure of late nineteenth century England. However, it can also be argued that Nesbit maybe did not even intend to instruct her readers, but simply wanted to draw a realistic picture of English society of the nineteenth century by presenting typical language usage in her novels.

4.3.3 Intertextuality

Nesbit was greatly influenced by other contemporary writers when writing her children's novels. This influence becomes visible in the fact that in her stories she constantly draws on other texts. Julia Briggs (*Edith Nesbit* 227) states that Edith has taken the ideas for her writing from her own reading. Carpenter and Gubar both confirm Brigg's statement. Carpenter, for instance, points out "that [Edith Nesbit] knew how to borrow, and the degree of originality in [her stories] is comparatively small." (Carpenter 136) Gubar states that "Nesbit repeatedly acknowledges her own indebtedness to outside sources in her children's novels, often mentioning by name the well-known authors whose work she improvises on." (Gubar 130) This literary phenomenon is famously known as 'intertextuality'. In fact intertextuality is "[a] term used to refer to such matters as

influences, sources [and] allusions [...] in order to suggest how authors echo some elements of other texts in their work.” (Beckson et al. 129) Wolfreys et al. (48) add that intertextuality, first introduced by the literary theorist Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, can be employed consciously by a writer or speaker through quotations and allusions as well as unconsciously. The French literary theorist Gérard Genette provides a more precise distinction and divides the term intertextuality into three components: quotations, allusions and plagiarism (Makaryk 570). A quotation is “a passage or remark repeated by someone other than the person who originally said or wrote it.” (Soanes et al. 838) Plagiarism refers to “the theft of ideas [...] or of written passages or works, where these are passed off as one’s own work without acknowledgement of their true origin.” (Baldick 194) In contrast, an allusion is “an indirect or passing reference to some event, person, place, or artistic work, the nature and relevance of which is not explained by the writer but relies on the reader’s familiarity with what is thus mentioned.” (7) In all three primary texts of this thesis Nesbit makes use of allusions. On the one hand, Nesbit included references to other texts by explicitly pointing out their titles and by commenting on the texts. On the other hand, bits and pieces of referential texts were borrowed, transformed and integrated into the storyline of the novels. The more interesting questions in this context are which texts Nesbit used for her borrowing, for which purpose Nesbit integrated the references into her novels and whether Nesbit attempted to convey her social values through the use of intertextuality. To answer these questions, it is crucial to have a look at the three novels in detail. Marah Gubar gives an enumeration of the various intertexts⁴ used by Edith Nesbit. She states that

[t]he hyperliterate heroes and heroines of E. Nesbit’s children’s stories are promiscuous readers par excellence, having read everything from didactic tracts to adventure stories, from novels by Dickens and Thackeray to children’s books by Kipling and Grahame. Nesbit was even relaxed enough to allow them access to the penny dreadfuls and yellow-covered novels that so many of her peers denounced as devastatingly destructive to youthful purity. (Gubar 129)

⁴ The term 'intertexts' refers to the referential texts used by Edith Nesbit.

Gubar's statement is completely valid as in all three texts Nesbit's main characters refer to texts they have once read. For example in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, Oswald narrates that

[o]f course we have read Mr Sherlock Holmes as well as the yellow-covered books with pictures outside that are so badly printed; and you get them for fourpence-halfpenny at the bookstall when the corners of them are beginning to curl up and get dirty, with people looking to see how the story ends when they are waiting for trains. I think this is most unfair to the boy at the bookstall. The books are written by a gentleman named Gaboriau, and Albert's uncle says they are the worst translations in the world – and written in vile English. Of course, they are not like Kipling, but they're jolly good stories. And we had just been reading a book by Dick Diddlington – that's not his right name, but I know all about libel actions, so I shall not say what his name is really, because his books are rot. Only they put it into our heads to do what I am going to narrate. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 32)

As the quotation already indicates, the main source of reference in all three primary novels is Rudyard Kipling and especially *The Jungle Books*, published in 1894. In *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, Oswald praises Albert's uncle for giving him and his siblings *The Jungle Books* stating: "I do like Albert's uncle. [...] He gave us our Jungle Books, and he is awfully clever, though he does have to write grown-up tales." (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 211) To end the novel in Chapter Fourteen, Oswald tells the reader:

The next day was the most memorable day in all our lives, but we didn't know that then. But that is another story. I think that is such a useful way to know when you can't think how to end up a chapter. I learnt it from another writer named Kipling. I've mentioned him before, I believe, but he deserves it! (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 212 - 213)

Both quotations indicate that Nesbit seemed to be extremely in awe of Rudyard Kipling. The high praise by her child protagonists reflects how much Nesbit herself valued Kipling and his children's books. The reference to Kipling lessens increasingly in her later published books, especially in *The Railway Children*.⁵ In *Five Children and It*, the only reference to Kipling is similar to the one provided above. It is used to end Chapter Five of the novel after Andrew has rescued the children from the top of the church tower and has brought them home safely:

⁵ This conclusion results from my personal observation and from the comparison of the three primary texts.

So Andrew had to drive off alone [...] and, when [the children] had been swept to bed in a whirlwind of reproaches, remained to explain Martha and the cook and the housemaid exactly what had happened. He explained so well that Martha was quite amiable the next morning. After that he often used to come over and see Martha, and in the end – *but that is another story, as dear Mr Kipling says*. [emphasis added] (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 123)

Similar to *Five Children and It*, Nesbit only rarely draws on Kipling in *The Railway Children*. When the children meet the Russian exile, Peter states: “He’s Russian [...] or else he’s like “the man who was” – in Kipling, you know.” (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 102) Briggs gives one reason for the decline in references to Kipling. She explains that Edith Nesbit was always very impressed by Kipling’s writing. They were both writing at the same time and Nesbit even suggested collaborating with him. In 1906 literary borrowing suddenly changed into a more delicate matter as Nesbit accused Kipling of plagiarism (Briggs, *Edith Nesbit* 279). This can be one explanation for the declining reference to Kipling in Nesbit’s later novels. Another explanation can be a political one. Kipling is known for his imperialist depiction of society in his literature (Landow). John Gross, for example, points out that

[n]ot only did Kipling's politics colour his imaginative work to an exceptional degree. He also wrote a great deal of explicit propaganda. He was a superlative coiner of slogans ("The white man's burden", "East is east", a hundred others). He hobnobbed with public figures, from Cecil Rhodes to Theodore Roosevelt, and bombarded his favourite newspaper editors with suggestions and exhortations behind the scenes. (Gross)

What exactly was his political viewpoint and why did Nesbit draw so much on his writing at the beginning and then seemed to have lost interest? Imperialism, with the British Empire and a great number of colonies, reached its peak during the nineteenth century under Queen Victoria. The United Kingdom was considered naively as superior to its colonies whose inhabitants were widely considered of being in need of civilisation (Landow). As Kipling was born in India and taking on an imperialist side, opinions on his literature were extremely divergent. His texts, including novels as well as poems, were characterised by the imperialist viewpoints and were highly praised as well as condemned as racist and contradictory at the same time. Not only Kipling’s literature was taken as contradictory, but also he as a person was considered highly contradictory. Even though he showed sympathy for the lower classes, he mistrusted all forms

of democratic politics (Halley). Reid et al. try to give a less radical explanation and provide a different view of the matter by stating that

[i]t is clear [...] that Kipling's imperialism represented no simple racism. [...] Nor can his views be written off as a lower middle class snarl against privilege above and pretensions beneath. Rather, his ideas [...] ought to be seen as lying in the mainstream of late nineteenth-century post liberal thought about the nature of society and politics. Their imperatives were to conserve and constrain rather than liberate and change. And Kipling was prepared to apply them as much to the domestic British as to the imperial Indian context. His battles with the Liberal Party make it clear that he was as opposed to democracy and liberalism, and as disposed to elitism and hierarchy, in English society as in the tropics. His ideas were conceived as having a universal currency, and they shared much in common with those of political thinker of his time on both sides of the ostensible Conservative and Liberal-Socialist divide. He has affinities, for example, with both Fabians and Milnerites, just as they had affinities with each other. His views represent a comment on contemporary political debate. (Reid)

It seems plausible to suggest that Nesbit alluded to Kipling's literature because he was in favour of the Fabian Society, as pronounced in the quotation above, but the matter is not as straightforward, because quite obviously Kipling was more imperialist than socialist. Even more contradictory is the fact that Nesbit, although claiming to be socialist, included imperialist beliefs into her novels too. For instance, the Uncle who is rescuing the children in the end of the story is Indian and Oswald explains that "he didn't look like an Indian but just like a kind of brown, big Englishman, and of course he didn't see us." (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 215). In *Five Children and It* Cyril wishes that "there were Red Indians in England – not big ones [...] but little ones, just about the right size [...] to fight." (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 208) Nesbit depicts Indians in an extremely comical and naïve way and thereby confirms the idea of imperialism according to which savages need to be civilised. The issue of Imperialism is brought up when Oswald eavesdrops on the conversation between his Father and the Indian Uncle:

Then the poor Indian said something about vintage – and that a poor, broken-down man like he was couldn't be too careful. And then Father said, 'Well, whiskey then,' and afterwards they talked about Native Races and Imperial something or other and it got really dull. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 216)

Nesbit is only bringing up the topic without commenting further on it, but just by doing so she draws the reader's attention to the subject and encourages further reflection. The most interesting scene in this context is taking place in *Five Children and It*. Cyril wishes that "there were Red Indians in England – not big ones [...] but little ones, just about the right size [...] to fight." (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 208) The wish results in a fight between the children and the little Red Indians. The children insofar win the fight as the Red Indians disappear when the wish ends. The fight might symbolically stand for imperialism, colonisation and the superiority of the British Empire. These aspects might hint at the fact that Nesbit was not completely against imperialistic beliefs. When looking at *The Railway Children*, however, the references to Kipling, as already pointed out in this section, were quite small in number compared to the other two texts. It can be argued that Nesbit was much more solidified in her political beliefs when writing *The Railway Children*. As the Fabian Society was already well established at that time, Nesbit was probably much more engaged into politics. When Nesbit published *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* the Society was still in its beginning. It can therefore only be assumed that Nesbit was not yet ready to take on a concrete political side, which expressed itself in her contradictory choice of intertexts. All in all it is impossible to make a definite statement that Nesbit's political engagement manifests itself in her use of intertextuality. From her frequent reference to Kipling in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *Five Children and It* it can be derived that Nesbit did not seem to be bound so much to socialism, but was open to other political opinions as well.

Apart from explicit references, Nesbit also borrowed from other sources, transformed the borrowings and finally integrated them into her novels. In her biography about Edith Nesbit, Julia Briggs explains that in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, Noël, when making acquaintance with the little Princess, pretends to be Prince Camaralzaman from the *Arabian Nights*. Briggs explains that Nesbit modified the scene from Grahame's *Golden Age*, where the narrator finds a little girl that assumes to be a princess. Nesbit then integrated the idea into *Five Children and It* (Briggs, *Edith Nesbit* 201). Nesbit was said to have borrowed her idea for the sand-fairy Psammead from Mary Louisa Molesworth's *The Cuckoo Clock* and *The Tapestry Room*. Molesworth used a very bad-

tempered Cuckoo and a Raven in her two novels. The Psammead can thus be considered as a cousin of Molesworth's Raven and Cuckoo (Carpenter 136). Carpenter also explains that in *Five Children and It*

[t]he children's perpetual inability to make any worthwhile use of daily wish is the motif of the traditional *Three Wishes*, while the intrusion of magic into the modern world was used as the stuff of fiction a few years before Nesbit by F. Anstey, in *Vice Versa* (1882) and *The Brass Bottle* (1900), the latter being the story of the embarrassments caused to a modern young man when he acquires the services of a genie. At the end of *Five Children and It* the children turn to *The Brass Bottle* to find a way of getting out of their difficulties. It seems likely that the Anstey book was the inspiration of the whole story. (Carpenter 136)

To conclude, the borrowing from other sources is an important feature of Nesbit's writing. She makes use of intertextuality for the progress of the story and hides her own opinion of certain writers behind her characters. The writer valued the most by the characters, and by Nesbit herself, is Rudyard Kipling. From a political perspective, it is not really straightforward and clear whether Nesbit referred to Kipling because of his political beliefs or whether she simply enjoyed reading his texts and was merely in awe of his writing style. From the analysis carried out it can only be stated that Nesbit seemed much more open-minded with regard to political beliefs than she claimed to be.

4.3.4 The Role of Characters

This section will take into account the characters and the roles they play with specific regard to social didacticism. In all three novels there are a great number of minor and major characters. Many of these characters have a specific didactic function and dispose of character traits which are crucial for the moral development of the protagonists and for the promotion of social values.

In *The Railway Children* the major characters are first and foremost the three siblings Roberta, Peter and Phyllis. The family, including the children and their mother, moves from London to the countryside. Their father, accused of espionage, is imprisoned and represents the absent character in the novel. In addition to the three children and their mother, there are also other characters who take on specific roles in the story, for example, Perks, the bargee Bill, the

Old Gentleman, the Red Jersey and of course, the Russian exile Mr. Szczepansky. These minor characters, even though they are more in the background of the story and less developed by Nesbit, have great influence on the major characters and their moral development in the novel. The story mainly focuses on the absence of the children's father. Noimann explains that

[i]n *The Railway Children* Nesbit [...] explores the common social phenomenon of the absence of the father from the home as a metaphor for the absence of patriarchy hierarchy in England. In doing so, she highlights all the stands in the way of much-needed social and political change. In other words, she presents the absent father as an opportunity that opens new possibilities for an alternate social arrangement. Nesbit questions the three patriarchal institutions of empire, nation, and the family by removing the symbolic head of each in one fell swoop. Father's absence allows for change and exposes often undetected obstacles to reform. (Noimann 368)

By leaning on Noimann's quote, emphasis will be put on the role of the characters in *The Railway Children* to promote social change. Noimann (372) states that the father has to leave the family because his absence is a prerequisite for further interaction between the three children and their new community. After their father's departure, the children seem to get adapted quite quickly to the new situation. This can be explained by the fact that the children are used to the absence of their father who has often been away from home because of business matters. In spite of father's absence, father is still considered as the "benevolent, kind, economically successful head of the family" (372) and considered as perfect in his children's eyes (372). This image reflects the societal norms of nineteenth century. Women were valued less than men, who were merely responsible for the earning of the money and for making decisions in terms of family matters (Mitchell 142). The family constellation and the roles of the family members change abruptly when father has to leave his family. From now on the children's mother is responsible for earning money and raising the children at the same time. To earn additional money, which was common usage during the nineteenth century (Altick 51), mother starts to write literature. The children spend less time with her and find new occupation such as watching the trains. When Peter is caught stealing coal, or as he calls it 'mining coal', the narrator sums up the situation:

[I]t was just like that with the sorrow the children had felt at Father's going away, and at Mother's being so unhappy. It made a deep impression, but the impression did not last long. They soon got used to being without Father, though they did not forget him; and they got used to not going to school, and to seeing very little of Mother, who was now almost all day shut up in her upstairs room writing, writing, writing. She used to come down at teatime and read aloud the stories she had written. They were lovely stories. (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 43)

Mother is from now on the head of the family and having considered Nesbit's biographical background it is not farfetched to draw similarities between the family in the story and Edith Nesbit's own family. It seems as if Nesbit is reworking her memories into the character of the mother in *The Railway Children* because Nesbit often took care of her children alone when Hubert was absent due to his political engagement (Briggs, Edith Nesbit 238). Additionally, the mother's engagement in writing in *The Railway Children* alludes to Nesbit's own writing career and reflects Nesbit's initial struggle to sell her literature and to make money with it (72). In the novel mother is thus undergoing changes with regard to autonomy and financial independence. Furthermore, Nesbit promotes equality when the children and their mother are integrated into the new society of the village (Noimann 373). For example, the children emancipate themselves from their parents and become so-called "children of the railway" (373). They are now part of a community where the principle of equality rules. According to Noimann (370) Nesbit promotes individual responsibility and a sense of community which can be perceived as a critical comment on the nineteenth century British societal structure, which separated people of various classes. Noimann further points out that "[h]er main political point in the novel is that British society must first admit to the need for social interdependence. In her novel the communal rearing of children places society on the road to interdependence." (370) The interdependence of community members and the promotion of equality is reinforced in the various events taking place in *The Railway Children*. In the rural village there is a ruling principle of "give and take". The children are dependent on the adults, and so are the adults on the children. For instance the old gentleman, who always takes the same train and the children's greetings to their father to London, reunites the Russian exile with his wife and children. Later in the novel, the old gentleman's grandson Jim has a race accident. Found by the three siblings in the tunnel, he receives their help

straight away. Mother is then nursing Jim and gets even paid by the old gentleman who explains to the children:

Your mother, my dears, has consented to give up writing for a little while and to become matron of my hospital. [...]The hospital is called Three Chimneys hospital [...] and my unlucky Jim's the only patient, and I hope he'll continue to be so. Your mother will be matron, and there'll be a hospital staff of a housemaid and a cook, till Jim's well. (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 252)

Another incidence, where the interdependence of the inhabitants of the village is focused on, takes place in Chapter Eight, called 'The Amateur Fireman'. Although the bargee shouts at the children for fishing in the canal, the three siblings help the couple's baby and their dog. The dog and the baby are stuck on the cabin, which has caught fire while the couple has been away. As a sign of gratification, the children are from now on allowed to fish in the canal. In the same chapter, the narrator even describes an ideal society ruled by equality. The narrator states:

There was a pleasant party of barge people round the fire. You might not have thought it pleasant, but they did; for they were all friends or acquaintances and they liked the same sort of things, and talked the same sort of talk. This is the real secret of pleasant society. (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 158 – 159)

The novel is thus full of good deeds which all promote equality especially between middle and working class members. However, these good deeds are primarily initiated by the main characters in need. It can therefore be assumed that without the children's asking for help a successful collaboration between adults and children might not have taken place (Noimann 371). Noimann also emphasises the fact that in the novel

[t]he children may not *knowingly* affect the adult world, but they do affect it unknowingly because events that seem extraordinary to adults are often commonplace to children. The children are unaware of the larger political goals Nesbit intends for their community. But they seem to be working toward them nevertheless, and they do so with great success. On the other hand, all of the adults in *The Railway Children* are often mistaken in their words and deeds. By showing their faults, Nesbit suggests the different ways individuals might consider changing themselves, thus beginning a process that would eventually change an entire community. (Noimann 371)

Nesbit might have had the intention to make the reader aware of the fact that societal change lies in the responsibility of the children. Children, representing the future generation, have the ability to change things and reorganise society because of their open-mindedness and their enthusiasm. By promoting change in society by means of relying on the next generation, the novel reflects the Fabian Society's intention to change things gradually (Clayes 197), for instance through education and the formation of clubs to reach the youngest of British society (Harrison 145 – 146). The character of the Russian exile Mr. Szczepansky contributes to the promotion of political beliefs. Julia Briggs assumes that Mr. Szczepansky represents Stepniak, a Russian exile who regularly attended Fabian Society meetings in London and quickly befriended Hubert Bland and Edith Nesbit. Stepniak wrote for the Fabian magazine *To-Day*, which was edited by Hubert Bland. Through Stepniak, Nesbit developed an aversion against the Czarist regime⁶ in Russia (Briggs, *Edith Nesbit* 91). In *The Railway Children* Nesbit alludes to Stepniak's socialist writing. Bobbie explains to the old gentleman that he "had written the beautiful book about poor people, and had been sent to prison and to Siberia for just that." (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 139) From the quotation it can be derived that Mr. Szczepansky's book is dealing with socialism as the topic of poverty is brought up. The character Mr. Szczepansky thus personifies socialism and underlines Nesbit's aversive attitude towards the Russian politics. Additionally, Mr. Szczepansky who stays with the family represents the "physical presence of their father in the home as well as the constant threat of the failure of social reform." (Noimann 374) Noimann explains that other characters in the novel function as substitutes for the absent father too:

The children form significant relationships with several men and women around their new country home following the arrest of their father. These men and women address the children's various needs, be they physical, emotional, material, or educational – needs that would have been met by the their absent father and are unfulfilled when he is away. These characters also express attitudes and ideas that Nesbit finds objectionable and in need of reform. She reproaches the stern moralistic rules of the Station Manager, who represent the disciplinary aspect of

⁶Between mid- sixteenth and early-twentieth century Russia was ruled by czars. The Russian government was an autocracy, which means that the czar was the absolute ruler of the country. People, ranging from landowners to peasants, were restricted by the government in all their freedom, for example, serfs, as peasants were called, were forced to stay on and farm the same lands for their entire lives (Trumbauer et al. 13 – 14).

fatherhood, while celebrating the effective practicality of capital in the Old Gentleman, who stands in place of the father as provider – here used in a socially conscious manner. The Porter is the children's favourite substitute, probably because he is as playful as their father was, but Nesbit uses him to demonstrate how the lower class's attempt to apply upper-class conventions to their lives is impossible and needless. The Bargee is neglectful, violent, and needlessly harsh, but through him Nesbit shows that all can share in her new society, even the most disenfranchised. (Noimann 373)

According to Noimann every character in the novel is functioning as substitution for the absent father. By highlighting a society whose members are able to cooperate and support each other, Nesbit shows that a community is based on equality and cooperation. This reflects the Fabian Society's basic principle of equality, which has already been pointed out earlier in this section.

While the father is absent in *The Railway Children*, the mother represents the absent character in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*. In the novel, mother has passed away and the six children Dora, Oswald, Dicky, Alice, Noël and Horace Octavius live with their father. The death of the children's mother is tightly linked to the crashed business of their father and the resulting poverty of the family:

Father was very ill after Mother died; and while he was ill his business partner went to Spain – and there was never much money afterwards. Then the servants left and there was only one, a General. A great deal of your comfort and happiness depends on having a good General. The last but one was nice: she used to make jolly good currant puddings for us, and let us have the dish on the floor and pretend it was a wild boar we were killing with our forks. But the General we have now nearly always makes sago puddings, and they are the watery kind, and you cannot pretend anything with them, not even islands, like you do with porridge. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 12)

It seems as if mother's death initiated all the troubles of the family. In the novel, Nesbit reinforces the importance of the mother figure in a family. Clearly Nesbit integrated her own experiences into the novel. Nesbit's father passed away when Nesbit was still very young. Nesbit was raised by her mother, who additionally ran her father's business (Carpenter 126). It can thus be argued that in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* Nesbit wanted to highlight the importance of a mother figure in a family home by depicting the family's struggle after mother's death. The theme of 'the fallen fortunes' also alludes to Nesbit's life. In fact her husband's "brush business [...] was short lived; like the Bastables' father he seems to have been susceptible to fraud by his partners."

(Carpenter 127) With the story Nesbit shows the consequences of a fallen business and illustrates the struggle of a family who must suddenly face poverty (Townsend 103). The novel is focusing on the various attempts of the children to restore the fallen fortunes of the family. Noël, for example, sells his poetry to make money and this reflects exactly what Nesbit did when her own family was running out of money after Hubert's crashed business (Carpenter 127). In the novel Nesbit thus emphasises the Fabian Society's principle based on labour. In the "Fabian Manifesto" it has even been explicitly stated "[t]hat it is the duty of each member of the State to provide for his or her wants by his or her own Labour." (Pease 28) In the end of the novel the children's attempts, which are basically forms of labour to earn money, are rewarded by the Indian Uncle, who shows up out of the blue and restores the fallen fortunes of the family. John Rowe Townsend (103 – 104) argues that the sudden appearance of an uncle was a very typical device of Victorian writers to indicate that there was no possible solution for the problem. By presenting to her readers that labour always leads to reward, Nesbit conveys to her readers the main socialist principle and is therefore politically didactic.

Another important character in the novel is Albert-next-door's uncle. He takes on a didactic function in the novel. Albert-next-door's uncle is indeed instructing the children and informing them about the wrongs and rights of life. He does so in a very friendly and understanding way. If the children are in trouble they immediately ask Albert-next-door's uncle for help, for instance, when the children accidentally bury Albert-next-door during their treasure seeking. The children seem to like him so much because he is a writer, educated and very literate himself, understands the child's minds and teaches the children important values of life. The following passage illustrates the above:

'So you were digging for treasure,' said Albert-next-door's uncle, wiping his face again with his handkerchief. 'Well, I fear that your chances of success are small. I have made a careful study of the whole subject. What I don't know about buried treasure is not worth knowing. And I never knew more than one coin buried in any one garden – and that is generally – Hullo – what's that?' He pointed to something shining in the hole he had just dragged Albert out of. Oswald picked it up. It was a half-crown. We looked at each other, speechless with surprise and delight, like in books. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 30)

It becomes quickly obvious to the reader that Albert's uncle has hidden the money, when Oswald states: "I wish Albert-next-door's uncle would come treasure-seeking with us regularly; he must have very sharp eyes: for Dora says she was looking just the minute before at the very place where the second half-crown was picked up from, and *she* never saw it." (31) Albert-next-door's uncle supports the children and tries to help them financially. Carpenter explains that "[t]hroughout *The Treasure Seekers* and the other Bastable books, adults play this role of kindly protector. There is not one sharp or satirical portrait of an adult." (Carpenter 133) Not only Albert's-next-door uncle plays such a role but also characters like the lady poet and the Fleet Street editor. Both of them help the children because they feel pity for them and want to support them. (133) In fact, Nesbit portrays herself in the character of Mrs. Leslie (Gubar 143). Mrs. Leslie is "a sort of poet" (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 54) as Oswald describes her and she teaches the children about literature and writing:

The lady laughed – she was awfully jolly – and said she was a sort of poet, too, and the long strips of paper were the proof of her new book of stories. Because before a book is made into a real book with pages and a cover, they sometimes print it all on strips of paper, and the writer makes marks on it with a pencil to show the printers what idiots they are not to understand what a writers means to have printed. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 54)

Gubar explains that Mrs. Leslie "turns out to be a [...] glorification of Nesbit's own prolific but never entirely successful career as an author of verse." (Gubar 143) Mrs. Leslie and Albert-next-door's uncle are characters who take the children serious in their attempt to make money and try to help them. Through these adult characters Nesbit supports "the child as a creative agent in his or her own right" (143) and additionally promotes the social values of community and equality like in *The Railway Children*.

In *Five Children and It* adults play a less prominent role. They are in the background because "[f]ather had to go away suddenly on business, and mother had gone away to stay with Granny, who was not very well." (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 5) The novel, like the two other texts, takes up the metaphor of the father's as well as mother's absence. Again it can be argued that Nesbit was reworking her own childhood experiences in the story. While *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* foregrounds the absent parent, in *Five*

Children and It the focus is put on the sand-fairy Psammead. In the novel the sand-fairy, called 'It', is taking on a didactic role. The novel follows the motto 'Learn from your own mistakes' and teaches the reader to think before speaking. Each day the children are granted a wish by the sand-fairy. However, thoughtless as the five children are, they utter their wishes without reflecting upon them. The children consequently face a number of adventures. For example, they have to fight against miniature Native Americans, nearly lose their little baby brother to a Gypsy family and end up on top of a church tower because they have wished themselves wings, which disappear overnight. As the wishes are reversed after sunset, the children are given time to reflect upon their experiences and to learn from them. In the end of the novel, the children come to the conclusion to never ask the sand-fairy for any wish again. The sand-fairy therefore teaches the child protagonists as well as the child readers to be satisfied with what you have. As already pointed out, adults play a more reduced role in *Five Children and It* compared to the other texts. The children's parents, mentioned only at the beginning of the story, are not taking actively part in the story. The only adult who is playing a more important role in the novel is Martha. Martha is the children's servant and seems to be responsible for the children's upbringing. Interestingly enough, in all three novels servants are an integral part of the family. This family constellation was typical for the Late Victorian period. It was common for middle class families to have various servants, nannies and governesses employed (Mitchell 146) and so do the families in the novels. In fact all families in the three novels are middle class members and dispose of a number of servants even though the families are temporarily facing poverty (Carpenter 128). Carpenter explains that in the novels servants such as

the cooks, parlourmaids, and the rest seem by implication to be inferior beings in every kind of way – in *Five Children and It* it is arranged that the servants shall not be able to see the results of the Psammead's magic, and though this is a necessary plot device one also feels it to be a comment on their place in the social hierarchy. It may be argued that Nesbit was simply typical of her time in her acceptance of the domination of the middle classes, and her apparent assumption that only middle-class children are appropriate heroes for children's books. (Carpenter 128)

Although Carpenter argues that the servants seem by implication inferior, in *Five Children and It* Martha plays an active part in the story and can even be considered as an attachment figure for the children. Contrary to Carpenter's hypothesis, it can be argued that Nesbit chose the servant Martha as main protagonist to illustrate the importance of the servants in a Victorian family and to promote equality between the social classes of British society, because Nesbit could have chosen a middle class or upper class parent instead of Martha; however, Nesbit intentionally did not do so.

Having considered all three novels with regard to social didacticism and the role of the characters it can be said that in *The Railway Children* and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* the adults specifically instruct and teach the child protagonists. The adults support the children in need and certain characters even replace the missing mother and father. In *Five Children and It* the sand-fairy Psammead is taking on an adult position, being instructive, though very grumpy at the same time. In all texts the characters are middle-class members disposing of a number of servants which are important for the children's development, especially in *Five Children and It*. The servants are not so much didactic per se, but make the reader aware of the society's hierarchy and of their importance in society. While Carpenter considers the role of servants in the texts as inferior, it can also be argued that Nesbit included the servants to show and present to her readers a society governed by the principles of equality and community, where everyone – be it middle- or working-class members - lives together peacefully and helps each other when being in need.

4.3.5 Structure, Chronology and the Past

In this chapter emphasis will be put on the analysis of chronology, structure and time in *The Railway Children*, *Five Children and It* and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*. While the term chronology is defined as "[t]he order in which events happen, especially when emphasizing a cause-effect relationship in history or in a narrative" (Wheeler), the term structure will refer to the internal setup of a text including chapters, its titles and the chapter's relation with each other. To begin with, the novels' structure will be taken into account. Manlove

explains that “Nesbit is, perhaps most distinctively of all, one of the first children’s fantasy writers to use the idea of a single thread of directed narrative over a novel length. Previously most longer children’s fantasy had been episodic or desultory.” (Manlove 47) With regard to her realist children’s books it has been pointed out that a progress from anecdotal to a single continuing narrative is remarkable. *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, published in 1899 was more episodic while *The Railway Children*, published seven years later, can already be considered as ‘joined-up’ narrative (48). What is an episodic narrative in contrast to a joined-up one? To answer this question, it is essential to analyse the three texts with regard to their structure. *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* is built up by sixteen chapters all in all. Each chapter is dedicated to one little adventure, or more specifically to one attempt of treasure-seeking. Each chapter thus introduces a new scenario which is exactly what the term ‘episodic’ is referring to. *The Five Children and It* is generally structured by episodes too. However, the seven chapters are much more linked together and there is no clear-cut distinction between the various chapters and adventures. Compared to *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *Five Children and It*, *The Railway Children* is structured differently. The fourteen chapters of the novel are completely linked together. The novel consists of a complete narrative with a beginning and an end. Nesbit even named the first chapter ‘The Beginning of Things’ and the final chapter ‘The End’. There is no longer a focus on single adventures, however, Nesbit emphasises the social life of a community and the children’s struggle with the absence of their father. When reading the novel, the reader can identify a clear thread. This is why the book can be considered as a continuing narrative. The question pops up why Nesbit changed her novels’ structures over the years. Manlove explains that

[a]ctually Nesbit’s writing from the 1890s to the war follows a pattern, in that she first writes for the very young (for example Pussy Tales and Doggy Tales in 1895), and then for progressively older children. This was not in parallel with the growth of her own children, born in the early 1890s: when she was writing her children’s fantasies, they were in their twenties. What the changes show is the way that childhood itself was being enlarged by the nostalgic adults of the time; nor should we ignore the effect of the Education Acts of 1870 and 1902 in extending the school leaving age and thereby lengthening childhood. (Manlove 48)

Nesbit clearly had a specific target audience in mind and shaped her texts according to her intended audience. It is particularly interesting to consider that not only the structure of the texts changed over the years but also the novels' plot. *Five Children and It* and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, which were published earlier and according to Manlove's statement addressed to fairly young readers, are much more delighting and light-hearted. *The Railway Children*, in comparison, brings up serious topics such as espionage, politics and economy. Nesbit clearly knew how to adapt her stories to her reader's needs and interests.

Having briefly discussed the structure of the novels, the chronology of the texts will now be discussed. All three novels seem to be extremely chronological at first glance. One adventure, typically dedicated to one chapter, is immediately followed by another one. This is certainly the case in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *Five Children and It*. However, when looking more closely at *The Railway Children* various flashbacks are noticeable in the storyline. In these flashbacks, the children melancholically dwell on their past. The melancholic tone is already established at the beginning of the novel:

They were not railway children to begin with. I don't suppose they had ever thought about railways except as means of getting to Maskelyne and Cooke's, the pantomime, the Zoological Gardens, and Madame Tussaud's. They were just ordinary suburban children, and they lived with their father and mother in an ordinary red-brick-fronted villa, with coloured glass in the front door, a tiled passage that was called a hall, a bathroom with hot and cold water, electric bells, French windows, and a good deal of white paint, and 'every modern convenience', as the house-agents say. (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 13)

Another example shall illustrate the nostalgia in the novel. When the three child characters sit together with their mother one evening, they think about and reflect upon their past:

That evening in the hour before bedtime instead of reading to the children Mother told them stories of the games she and Father used to have when they were children and lived near each other in the country – tales of the adventures of Father with Mother's brothers when they were all boys together. Very funny stories they were, and the children laughed as they listened. 'Uncle Edward died before he was grown up, didn't he?' said Phyllis, as Mother lit the bedroom candles. 'Yes, dear,' said Mother, 'you would have loved him. He was such a brave boy, and so adventurous. Always in mischief, and yet friends with everybody in spite

of it. And your Uncle Reggie's in Ceylon – yes, and Father's away, too. But I think they'd all like to think we'd enjoyed talking about the things they used to do. Don't you think so?' (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 185 - 186)

Susan Anderson confirms the presence of nostalgia and melancholy in Nesbit's texts and talks about an idealisation of the past (319) caused by the deficiencies of the present (qtd. in Shaw et al. 3). In *The Railway Children* the past is definitely portrayed as a better time. By contrasting past and present, Nesbit criticises the present-day situation and praises the good old times when father was present and money was available. The same is true for *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*; however, the references to the past are much more subtle. For example in Chapter Eleven when Dora remembers her mother, before her death, asking her to take care of her siblings. Sometimes the protagonists refer to the past by emphasising how good they had it before. In Chapter One, for instance, Oswald talks about their former General and the puddings she made, which were so much better. Interestingly, in *Five Children and It* there is no reference to the past at all. This means that flashbacks have been completely avoided by Nesbit. The main focus is put on the present day. Hence, the overall tone of the novel is much more delighting compared to *The Railway Children* and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*. While the incidences of the past have led the characters to their present adventures and have caused their struggles of the present in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *The Railway Children*, the children in *Five Children and It* meet the sand-fairy, responsible for the progress of the story, in the here and now.

Concluding from what has been pointed out, *The Railway Children* and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, regarding structure and chronology, are more concerned with the past and with criticism of the present. In both novels the children's sudden poverty is highlighted. The emphasis on capital loss as well as the death of one parent might encourage readers to think about the poorest of the societal scale, such as orphanages, who neither had money nor caring parents.

4.3.6 Boys and Girls

This section will take into account the aspect of sex and gender in the three novels with special regard to social didacticism. The term 'sex' refers to the biologically determined attributes of a human being while the term 'gender' is ascribed to the social behaviour expected and determined by culture and society (Glover et al. xix – xxii). Wolfreys et al. add that

[g]ender [...] include[s] everything a person does, from the clothes he or she wears, to choices of leisure activity, and from career and education to tone of voice. The concept of gender argues that a person may have male sex, but may have feminine attributes in relation to the cultural norms of his society, and vice versa, a female person may exhibit masculine traits. [...] Gender therefore describes the ways in which masculinity and femininity (the performance of gender, as opposed to the biology of sex) serve ideologically to maintain a particular status quo in society at large. (Wolfreys et al. 37)

This means that men and women act according to female and male gender roles which are already learned in childhood (Glover et al. xix – xxii). In the nineteenth century British children's literature was used to communicate gender roles to boys and girls. While literature for girls was concerned with the domestic world, moral and social values and family issues with the aim to keep them pure and innocent, boys often read stories including adventures and action to prepare them for a world of competition, industry and commerce (Segel 191 – 193). The children's actual reading was different. While boys had the tendency to stay with the boys' literature, it was very likely for girls to read boys' literature as well. For that reason many female characters in boys' books represented the Victorian gender role of female subservience (196 – 198). *The Railway Children*, *Five Children and It* and *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* reflect the Victorian tendency to glorify the heroic male and to depict females as inferior. According to Smith (160) Nesbit takes on a very pro-masculine attitude in her literature. The narrator Oswald in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* is the most illustrative example of Victorian gender roles. In fact, "Oswald as narrator is a remarkable, if juvenile, "male chauvinist" in the comments he makes about his sisters and about girls in general." (Smith 157) For example, when the siblings mix sugar into bottles of sherry, try to sell them to the Vicarage and get thrown out, Oswald narrates:

Dora was crying like anything and Alice hugging her. I am afraid there is a great deal of crying in this chapter, but I can't help it. Girls will sometimes; I suppose it is their nature, and we ought to be sorry for their affliction. [...] I hope you will not think I was a muff but I kissed Dora for some time. Because girls like it. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 156 – 157)

Oswald more explicitly expresses his anti-female attitude in Chapter Twelve and states that

Dicky stopped and smoked the pipe of peace. It is the pipe we did bubbles with in the summer, and somehow it has not got broken yet. We put tea-leaves in it for the pipe of peace, but the girls are not allowed to have any. It is not right to let girls smoke. They get to think too much of themselves if you let them do everything the same as men. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 162)

Smith argues that “[s]ince E. Nesbit herself smoked, one can assume she intended to satirize sex role stereotypes.” (Smith 158) Smith’s assumption that Nesbit satirises stereotypes is also interesting if we consider the character of Noël Bastable because he is incorporating many feminine features. Noël is very artistic and poetic. He loves writing poetry and in the novel he is portrayed as very shy and timid. These characteristics are normally linked to girls rather than boys. Therefore Oswald makes derogatory comments and, for example, tells Noël to “be a man and not a snivelling pig.” (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 18) When Oswald and his brother Noël meet the editor to sell Noël’s poetry and the editor wants to know who of the boys is the poet, Oswald narrates, “I can’t think how he could have asked! Oswald is said to be a very manly-looking boy for his age. However, I thought it would look duffing to be offended, so I said – ‘This is my brother Noël. He is the poet.’ Noël had turned quite pale. He is disgustingly like a girl in some ways.” (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 62) Oswald is obviously offended by the editor’s question because he, as the manly brother of the two, can, of course, not be the poet. Although Oswald is criticising boys who are disposing of feminine character traits, it can be argued that Nesbit quite intentionally included Noël in order to reverse gender roles and stereotypes, which underlines Smith’s statement above. The female characters in the novel are more in the background of the story. Dora is the eldest sister of the Bastables and therefore the most reasonable. Alice, however, is Oswald’s younger sister and all in all more tomboyish, which makes her Oswald’s favourite (Smith 158). In the novel Dora

tries to have a say but she always fails and is restricted to her suppressed female gender role. The boys are clearly in control and are responsible for decision-making. When the children consider restoring their fallen fortunes this becomes mostly visible because Dora is immediately interrupted and ignored by her siblings:

Then Dora jumped up and dropped the stocking and the thimble [...], and said – ‘Let’s try my way *now*. Besides, I’m the eldest, so it’s only fair. Let’s dig for treasure. Not any tiresome divining-rod – but just plain digging. People who dig for treasure always find it. And then we shall be rich and we needn’t try your ways at all. Some of them are rather difficult: and I’m certain some of them are wrong – and we must always remember that wrong things –’ But we told her to shut up and come on, and she did. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 20)

Dora is thus representing the typical Victorian female who is weak, subservient and has no say at all. While stereotypical gender roles become extremely obvious in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, female and male gender roles are less emphasised in *The Railway Children* and *Five Children and It*. The novels even reflect a slight tendency of promoting equality. For instance, when Peter asks if girls can also mend engines, his father states, “Of course they can. Girls are just as clever as boys, and don’t you forget it!” (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 19) In the novel Nesbit brings together the aspect of man-dominated railway business and women. For example, Bobbie is explained all details of engineering including brakes, injectors and boilers by the engineers in Chapter Four. However, Nesbit does not completely let go of gender stereotypes and still tends to restrict her female characters to Victorian gender roles. When mother gets seriously ill, Bobbie nurses her all day and night. Bobbie is also the one who stays with Jim in the tunnel and calms him down by holding his hand. Like Dora in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, Bobbie is the eldest of her three siblings and also the most reasonable and responsible one of the three children. Contrary to Dora, however, Bobbie is much more rebellious and has a lot more to say. When Peter wishes to have “a brother instead of two whiny little kiddy sisters” (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 188), Bobbie immediately hits back and states, “I can’t think why little boys were ever invented.” (188) Bobbie’s courage and her will power are even praised by Jim when Bobbie takes care of him in the tunnel waiting for help to arrive:

'What's your name?' said Bobbie.
 'Jim.'
 'Mine's Bobbie.'
 'But you are a girl, aren't you?'
 'Yes, my long name's Roberta.'
 'I say – Bobbie.'
 'Yes?'
 'Wasn't there some more of you just now?'
 'Yes, Peter and Phil – that's my brother and my sister. They've gone to get someone to carry you out.'
 'What rum names. All boys'.
 'Yes – I wish I was a boy, don't you?'
 'I think you are all right as you are.'
 'I didn't mean that – I meant don't you wish *you* were a boy, but of course you are without wishing.'
 'You're just as brave as a boy.' (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 225)

In this conversation, the position of boys, which was valued higher in Victorian British society, is emphasised as Bobbie explicitly points out that she wishes to be a boy instead of a girl. The use of male nicknames for the female characters contributes to the male superiority and underlines the fact that girls were not equally important as boys. The female protagonists have to disguise themselves behind a male identity in order to be taken seriously, which is exactly what female writers during the nineteenth century did and why Nesbit used her pseudonym 'E. Nesbit' (Altick 51). Roberta generally alludes very much to Nesbit herself and interestingly, the narrator of the story even points out that "if their mother had had a favourite, it might have been Roberta." (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 13) Roberta is a very tomboyish character, far from shy and does not hesitate to speak up. As Carpenter (131) points out Nesbit was known for her tomboyish attitude too. It is therefore not far-fetched to assume that Roberta's attempt to lean up against male prejudices reflects Nesbit's struggle to be taken seriously by her male acquaintances and her husband Hubert who, according to Smith (160), was said to have suppressed her a lot, forcing her even to accept his mistress and her two children in Edith's and Hubert's home (Briggs, *Edith Nesbit* 123 – 124). Smith further states that "the pro-masculine attitudes in her fiction served as an escape from the constrictions of her own situation." (Smith 160) The gender issue is similarly employed in *Five Children and It*. Boys are again foregrounded while girls remain more in the background of the story. The Lamb, after the children's wish grows up, even points out that "little girls should be seen and not heard" (Nesbit,

Five Children and It 194) This quotation reflects exactly the Victorian ideal of little girls and their roles in society. The Lamb is a very ambivalent character in general. Until the Lamb is growing up in Chapter Nine the reader is left in doubt about its sex. It remains unknown until the narrator states that “[h]e was their elder brother now” (193). Even the Lamb’s real name remains mysterious until it is given voice in Chapter Nine when “[t]he grown-up Lamb frowned. ‘My dear Anthea,’ he said, ‘how often am I to tell you that my name is Hilary or St Maur or Devereux? – any of my baptismal names are free to my little brothers and sisters, but not “Lamb” – a relic of foolish and far-off childhood.’” (193) The two girls Jane and Anthea are quite opposing character as well. While Anthea is described as “obstinate” (45), Jane is the more “hopeful” (45) and “truthful” (48) one. Both girls, however, play a much more inferior role compared to their brother Robert, the eldest of the five siblings. He is the decision-maker and in control of business matters. For example, Robert is the one who speaks up when the children try to buy a carriage and a horse. The narrator even states that “[i]t had been agreed that Robert should be spokesman, because in books it is always the gentlemen who buy horses, and not ladies, and Cyril had had his go at the Blue Boar.” (45) The allusion to boy’s books, which have been explained at the beginning of this section, highlights the fact that Nesbit followed the Victorian norms by including gender stereotypes in her novel. Compared to the other two novels, the anti-female comments are much more reduced in *Five Children and It*.

Nesbit’s portrayal of female and male gender roles in all three novels stands very much in contrast with the Fabian Society’s principle with regard to women and men because Fabianism is basically fighting for equality between men and women. According to the Fabian Society’s Basis “the Fabian Society looks to the spread of Socialist opinions, and the social and political changes consequent thereon, including the establishment of equal citizenship for men and women.” (Pease 202) The issue of equality between men and women is even more precisely explained in the Manifesto where it has been written “[t]hat Men no longer need special political privileges to protect them against Women, and that sexes should henceforth enjoy equal political rights.” (Pease 30) Noimann goes further and states that “[a]ccording to Nesbit’s Fabianism, as long as men and women continue to think and behave according to

conventional social and gender codes, they will not be able to create a new socialist society.” (Noimann 368) Then of course the question arises why Nesbit is including gender stereotypes to such a great extent and why she emphasises the inferiority of her female protagonists in her novels. Smith states that the only explanation for the extreme depiction of gender roles is “her motive [...] to be subtly satirical of sex-role stereotypes” (Smith 157) because Nesbit did not support the status quo of her time (157). Smith’s argumentation seems plausible; however, considering that the texts are primarily addressed to children, who dispose of less advanced reading skills and tend to take things literally, it can be assumed that Nesbit’s subtle satirical writing style might probably not have proven successful. The matter of gender roles and stereotypes thus remains highly contradictory. It can therefore not explicitly be concluded whether or not Nesbit followed the Fabian principle of female and male equality. Of course, there are some hints to the promotion of female and male equality in *The Railway Children*, but these are quite limited in number and are not enough evidence to make a definite statement about Nesbit’s intention of promoting equality between males and females.

4.3.7 Magical Elements

In *Five Children and It*, in which Nesbit “demonstrated that fantasy could be wildly inventive and yet follow its own peculiar laws” (Manlove 47), magic takes on a very important role. This section will therefore take into consideration the aspect of magical realism in Nesbit’s fantasy novel *Five Children and It*. As the other two texts are realist novels, they will not be part of this analysis. The literary term for Nesbit’s use of magic is called ‘magical realism’. The definition of the concept is quite complex because there are various forms. Bowers provides a straightforward definition of the terminology:

Magic realism, magical realism and marvellous realism are highly disputed terms [...] because they encompass many variants. [...] It follows that a definition of magic(al) realism relies upon prior understanding of what is meant by ‘magic’ and what is meant by ‘realism’. ‘Magic’ is the less theorized term of the two, and contributes to the variety of definitions of magic(al) realism. In fact, each of the versions of magic(al) realism have differing meaning from the term ‘magic’; in magic realism ‘magic’ refers to the mystery of life; in marvellous and

magical realism 'magic' refers to any extraordinary occurrence and particularly to anything spiritual or unaccountable by rational science. The variety of magical occurrences in magic(al) realist writing includes ghosts, disappearances, miracles, extraordinary talents and strange atmospheres but does not include magic as it is found in a magic show. Conjuring 'magic' is brought about by tricks that give the illusion that something extraordinary has happened, whereas in magic(al) realism it is assumed that something extraordinary *really* has happened. (Bowers 20 – 21)

In other words, the term 'magical realism' refers to narratives built up by a realistic tone and including magical happening (3). For this reason magical realism can be considered an oxymoron because basically the two terms 'magic' and 'realism' are irreconcilable terms (1). Interestingly, Edith Nesbit is considered as forerunner of magical realism (104). Bowers points out that

[i]n English, the writer that first approached the idea of magical realism was the trail-blazing late-Victorian English children's writer Edith Nesbit [...]. Nesbit wrote books which later became known as 'modern fantasy' and which were revolutionary in that they rejected the adult moral tone used by so many children's writer before her. (Bowers 104 - 105)

The literary technique of magical realism is thus achieved through Nesbit's use of children's language and her depiction of actual child behaviour, which provides the basis for the occasional magical elements. Furthermore, the setting plays a crucial role in magical realism. Texts including magical realism are set in the real world. This is why fairy tales cannot be considered as magical realism because the actions usually take place in an imagined world (104 – 105). All of the above is true for Nesbit's *Five Children and It*. The story is set in the real world, namely in the countryside near London. At the beginning of the novel the narrator explains:

[T]he house was deep in the country, with no other house in sight, and the children had been in London for two years, without so much as once going to the seaside even for a day by an excursion train, and so the White House seemed to them a sort of Fairy Place set down in and Earthly Paradise. For London is like prison for children, especially if their relations are not rich. (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 2)

Although the story is set in an ordinary place, Nesbit gives the setting a magical touch. For example, it is narrated that

[t]he White House was on the edge of a hill, with a wood behind it – and the chalk-quarry on one side and the gravel-pit on the other. Down at the bottom of the hill was a level plain, with queer-shaped white buildings

where people burnt lime, and a big red brewery and other houses; and when the big chimneys were smoking and the sun was setting, the valley looked as if it was filled with golden mist, and the limekilns and oasthouses glimmered and glittered till they were like an enchanted city out of the *Arabian Nights*. (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 4)

By creating the idyllic and fairy-like setting Nesbit blurs the line between magic and reality, for example by making use of typical fairy-tale symbols such as the woods, glimmer and glitter. These symbols make the reader immediately think of a fairy tale. Ashliman (7) explains that the fairy-tale symbol “woods” typically represent freedom and danger at the same time. Even though the children do not find the sand-fairy in the woods, but in the gravel-pit nearby, the setting of the novel reflects both components of freedom and danger. On the one hand, the children are given the freedom to make their own wishes, but on the other hand, this freedom brings the children into trouble and danger. The most prominent fairy-tale element in the novel is of course the fairy. The fairy in *Five Children and It* is a lot more special than the usual Tinkerbell-like fairy the reader is acquainted with. The fairy in the novel is much more unconventional because after all it is a Sand-fairy:

The children stood round the hole in a ring, looking at the creature they had found. It was worth looking at. Its eyes were on long horns like a snail's eyes, and it could move them in and out like telescopes; it had ears like a bat's ears, and its tubby body was shaped like a spider's and covered with thick soft fur; its legs and arms were furry too, and it had hands and feet like a monkey's. (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 11)

The children are very sceptical and confused when finding the bad-tempered sand-fairy in the gravel-pit, but the children are extremely curious and want to find out more about the furry creature:

‘Well,’ said Anthea, still kindly, ‘perhaps if we knew who you are in particular we could think of something to say that wouldn't make you cross. Everything we've said so far seems to have. Who are you? And don't get angry! Because really we don't know.’

‘You don't know?’ it said. ‘Well, I knew the world had changed – but – well, really – do you mean to tell me seriously you don't know a Psammead when you see one?’

‘A Sammyadd’ That's Greek to me.’

‘So it is to everyone,’ said the creature sharply. ‘Well, in plain English, then, a *Sand-fairy*. Don't you know a Sand-fairy when you see one?’ (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 12)

The quotations above illustrate Bowers' statement and explanation of the term 'magic realism', which is given at the beginning of this section. The use of realistic children's language, the humoristic tone and the real setting give the reader the impression that the story takes place in real life and that a sand-fairy can show up in reality. The sand-fairy has even got a name, is able to speak English and considers itself as an ordinary figure (Bowers 105). At no point in the novel the children question the existence of such a creature, but simply take the sand-fairy for granted. The magical elements of the novel become obvious when the children discover that the sand-fairy Psammead can grant a wish a day. These wishes only last until sunset and cannot be seen by the servants. Magic therefore follows its own laws in Nesbit's *Five Children and It* (Manlove 47). Having determined that Nesbit's *Five Children and It* is a magical realist novel, it is now crucial to consider what effects magical realism brings with it and in how far it is concerned with social didacticism. Bowers (67) provides a twofold explanation and makes a distinction between transgressive and subversive qualities of magical realism. She argues that

[o]n the one hand, one can claim that magical realism is subversive because it alternates between the real and the magical using the same narrative voice. In this sense, magic remains identifiable as magic and real as real but, unlike in a realist narrative, they are given the same serious treatment. The extent to which one should accept the real as the version of events or the magical as the version of events is continuously undermined by the existence of the other version in the text. On the other hand, one can claim that magical realism is transgressive since magical realism crosses the borders between the magic and real to create a further category – the magical real. This form of magical realism is often discussed in terms of the post-structuralist theory which proposes that there are multiple eligible interpretations of a narrative and has become the most frequently adopted approach to magical realism since the 1980s. (Bowers 67)

Given the fact that Bowers (67) points out that the transgressive qualities are more widely accepted today, I have decided to stick to this form. Furthermore, the transgressiveness of magical realism "provides a means to attack the assumptions of the dominant culture." (69) The transgressive form of magical realism is therefore tightly linked to postcolonial studies which criticise the dominant culture of the male and white Western ruling classes of imperialism and intend to give voice to the "others", namely those who are denied power (68 - 69). Of course, it is impossible to take the postcolonial perspective and apply it

one to one to Nesbit's *Five Children and It* but taking on the more general idea of the opponent empowered/silenced, Nesbit probably intended to question British society and the implied power relation between adults/children. In the novel, the adults are completely deprived of all their powers. The parents are not actively taking part in the story until the very end when mother returns. Furthermore, the adulterary servants are not able to see the granted wishes. In contrast, the children are given voice in the novel. They make their own decisions and are in power of the story's progress. By giving voice to the children, it can be argued that Nesbit was criticising the Victorian image of the obedient and silenced children, suppressed by the adult world. In terms of politics, it can be assumed that Nesbit used magic to allude to the capitalistic system⁷, which was extremely despised by the Fabian Society's socialist beliefs (Pease 28 -29). By granting the children a wish a day, the sand-fairy is encouraging in the children a competitive striving. Competition, as a consequence of Capitalism, was heavily criticised by the Fabian Society. In the Society's "Manifesto", it has even been written "[t]hat, under the existing system of leaving the National Industry to organise itself Competition has the effect of rendering adulteration, dishonest dealing and inhumanity compulsory." (Pease 29) These negative effects of a competitive system become visible in the children's changing character traits and their actions. On the one hand, the children seem not to get enough of the wishes and are never satisfied even though they are constantly in trouble; on the other hand the children are starting to competitively argue amongst each other for the privilege to utter a wish. Anthea even gets up earlier than the others and sneaks out of the house in order to see the sand-fairy and to make her wish come true:

Anthea awoke at five. She had made herself wake. [...] At the very moment when she opened her eyes she heard the black-and-gold clock down in the dining room strike eleven. So she knew it was three minutes to five. [...] She was very sleepy, but she jumped out of bed and put her face and hands into a basin of cold water. This is the fairy charm that prevents your wanting to get back into bed again. [...] Then she took her shoes in her hand and crept softly down the stairs. She opened the dining-room window and climbed out. [...] Her heart was beating very

⁷ Capitalism is characterised by a free-market system and a competitive environment. Each individual is pursuing his or her own objects by buying and selling service and commodities. Socialism is heavily criticising capitalism because of the exploitation of labourers and the resulting class conflict (Cannon 163 – 164).

fast, *for she was carrying out a plan quite her own* [emphasis added].
(Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 88 – 90)

The newly found freedom changes the children's personality. As shown in the quotation above, they tend to become more egoistic and less considerate of their siblings' wishes and needs. For example, Robert only thinks of his own benefit when pronouncing his wish to make his little baby brother wanted by someone else. Robert states, "Anybody would want him, indeed! Only they don't; Martha doesn't, not really, or she'd jolly well keep him with her. He's a little nuisance, that's what he is. It's too bad. I only wish everybody did want him with all their hearts; we might get some piece in our lives." (64) In addition to their very egocentric attitudes, the children do not pay attention to the possible effects their utterances and their wishes might have on others. Nesbit kindly punishes the children for their egoism by bringing her child protagonists into trouble. By doing so, Nesbit teaches them important values of life, for example to be satisfied with what you have. Nesbit additionally brings up the philosophical question of happiness. Nesbit teaches the reader that materialistic things can never make you fully happy, but that only the love of the family brings you true happiness. This is illustrated by the following passage:

The morning after the children had been the possessors of boundless wealth, and had been unable to buy anything really useful or enjoyable with it, except two pairs of cotton gloves, twelve penny buns, an imitation crocodile-skin purse, and a ride in a pony-cart, they awoke without any of the enthusiastic happiness which they had felt on the previous day when they remembered how they had had the luck to find the Psammead, or Sand-fairy; and to receive its promise to grant them a new wish every day. For now they had had two wishes, Beauty and Wealth, and neither had exactly made them happy. (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 55)

In the end of the novel, the children come to the conclusion never to make any wish again. They have finally realised that happiness cannot be found in money, wings or castles. Reading the text from a twenty-first century perspective, the novel can even be considered as a critique on the consumerist society, and maybe Nesbit was alluding to the extravagant upper classes of Victorian Society. Nesbit makes the reader aware of the fact that happiness is not automatically linked to a person's high social status and his or her wealth. By doing so, Nesbit shows that no matter which class someone belongs to, the social background does not indicate how happy and content a person is with his

or her own life. Nesbit teaches the reader that happiness can be found in the smallest things in life, such as giving flowers to your mother as a welcoming present. Anthea even states, "Let's put flowers in all the vases, and try not to think about diamonds." (231) In the end of the novel the characters have learned to be grateful for what they have and finally decide never to ask the sand-fairy for any wish again:

'I wonder if we ever shall see the Psammead again,' said Jane wisely as they walked in the garden, while mother was putting the Lamb to bed.

'I'm sure we shall,' said Cyril, 'if you really wished it.'

'We've promised never to ask of for another wish,' said Anthea.

'I never want to,' said Robert earnestly. (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 243)

Comparing *Five Children and It* with *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *The Railway Children* in terms of ideology, Edith Nesbit teaches her reader more social than political values. Although the novel hints at capitalism and consumerism, the main aspect of the novel is the promotion of social values. This means that Nesbit teaches the reader to be grateful and considerate, to value and appreciate family life and to be satisfied with what you have. In addition, Nesbit makes the reader aware of the fact that happiness and wealth are not interdependent. The readers as well as the characters in the novel are taught that money alone does not make you happy but that family love contributes the most to a person's happiness.

4.3.8 Expression of Social Values

This section briefly brings into focus the expression of social values in the three novels. So far, especially in the last section of this thesis, emphasis has been put on Nesbit's way of indirectly teaching the reader social values through the protagonists' actions and their various adventures. For example, through the wishes which all go wrong the reader of *Five Children and it* is taught to be grateful for what he or she has. In addition, the reader is taught social values by the characters themselves. All child protagonists in Nesbit's novels are well-raised and completely aware of what society expects of a child, what kind of behaviour is considered as wrong or right. Through her characters Nesbit consequently presents to the reader the importance of good manners and

education. In *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, Oswald informs the reader about the importance of keeping the environment clean:

Saying buns made us think of lunch, so we had it; and when we had done we scratched a hole under a tree and buried the papers; because we know it spoils pretty places to leave beastly, greasy papers lying about. I remember Mother teaching me and Dora that, when we were quite little. I wish everybody's parents would teach them thus useful lessons, and the same about orange peel. (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 70 – 71)

Smith (162) states that in one of Nesbit's fantasy novels *The Story of the Amulet*, the protagonists travel into the future where everything is clean and proper, which is according to Smith (162) reflecting the ideal of the Fabian Society. Nesbit additionally foregrounds good manners, for instance in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* in which the reader is taught to stick to promises, for example when Oswald explains that "a promise is a sacred thing" (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 30), and to always mind your own business when it is stated that "it is very dishonourable to pry into other people's secrets, especially ladies." (46). Furthermore, honesty plays a crucial role in Nesbit's novels. In *The Railway Children* when the children ask their mother if she has ever walked on railway lines, the narrator points out that "Mother was an honest and honourable mother, so she had to say, 'Yes.'" (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 62) In the same book, the porter Perks praises the children when they admit that they have only come to see him to get some strawberries:

‘There's the 3:14 up,’ said Perks, ‘You lie low till she's through, and then we'll go up along to my place, and see if there's any of them strawberries ripe what I told you about.’
 ‘If there are any ripe, and you *do* give them to me,’ said Phyllis, ‘you won't mind if I give them to the poor Russian, will you?’
 Perks narrowed his eyes and then raised his eyebrows. ‘So it was them strawberries you come down for this afternoon, eh?’ said he.
 This was an awkward moment for Phyllis. To say ‘yes’ would seem rude and greedy, and unkind to Perks. But she knew if she said ‘no’, she would not be pleased with herself afterwards. So –
 ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘it was.’
 ‘Well done!’ said the porter; ‘speak the truth and shame the -’ (Nesbit, *The Railway Children* 117)

Phyllis is obviously torn between denying and admitting her primary intentions. As Phyllis is honest with herself and the porter, Nesbit presents her as a good example and role model, teaching her child readers that honesty is always the

better choice. The importance of honesty in Nesbit's novels reinforces the socialist critique on the capitalistic system which, according to the Fabian Society, changes people into greedy and dishonourable beings (Pease 29). As already stated, Nesbit additionally emphasises the role of good manners in her texts. For example, in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, Oswald narrates that the Editor "got up and stood with his back to [them]. It was not manners" (Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* 62) and that he "interrupted – which is considered rude" (66). These instructive comments raise awareness in the readers and may teach them good manners. Through Oswald's critique on the Editor, Nesbit additionally shows the readers that children may very often dispose of better manners than some adults. The second assumption is however rejected by one of the narrator's statements in *Five Children and It*. In the novel the narrator points out that "[i]t is very wise to let children choose exactly what they like, because they are very foolish and inexperienced, and sometimes they will choose a really instructive thing without meaning to." (Nesbit, *Five Children and It* 87). It is difficult to state whether Nesbit was merely satirical by ridiculing adults who considered children as naïve and stupid or whether Nesbit's depiction of children in the quotation is to be taken literal. In any case, it is straightforward that Nesbit was including didacticism into her children's novels. Not only did Nesbit allude to political issues, but she also intended to convey to her readers social values and good manners.

5. CONCLUSION

This diploma thesis brought into focus the three children's novels *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), *Five Children and It* (1902) and *The Railway Children* (1906) by the late Victorian writer Edith Nesbit. Edith Nesbit and her husband Hubert Bland were both members of the socialist Fabian Society, founded in 1884. The Society's aim was to promote equality between the various social classes of British society. The research question, outlined in the Introduction of the thesis, was therefore concerned with social didacticism. My aim was to find out to what extent social didacticism is traceable and visible in Nesbit's novel. The aspects of language and style, characterisation, intertextuality, gender and sex, magical elements, narration as well as chronology and structure have therefore been analysed with regard to Edith Nesbit's promotion of social and political values. Chapter Two and Three of this thesis provided the theoretical background information in terms of politics, economy and society of late Victorian Great Britain and helped the reader to understand the literary analysis of the three primary texts.

Carpenter (127 – 128) argues that Nesbit's socialist engagement was only half-hearted and superficial. Carpenter's argumentation is true if only Nesbit's active engagement in the Fabian Society is considered. Indeed, it is known for a fact that Nesbit was not as active as her for example her husband. However, if Nesbit's texts are analysed, the matter becomes more complex. The literary analysis of the three children's novels illustrated that Nesbit was influenced by the Fabian Society's social(ist) ideals to a very high degree. It can be stated that in all three novels Nesbit might have had the intention to teach and instruct her child readers about appropriate behaviour and good manners. For example, all three novels promote the social values of honesty, gratitude and family. Furthermore, Nesbit raises political issues in the novels. She tends to promote the Fabian principle of equality and community and questions the capitalistic system and its competitive implications. Some parts of the literary analysis, however, remain an enigma and are contradictory to Nesbit pronounced socialist beliefs. It is questionable why Nesbit used an exaggerated stereotypical depiction of girls and boys in all her novels even though the

Fabian Society was aiming for equality between men and women, and why Nesbit alluded so much to Kipling's literary texts although he was known for advocating imperialism. Yet, the literary analysis proved enough evidence to conclusively state that Nesbit's socialist engagement is indeed reflected to a great extent in the three novels. These findings contribute to Carpenter's hypothesis that Nesbit's "support of the socialist cause was only skin deep." (Carpenter 127 – 128). Although there are certain tendencies of the promotion of social(ist) values are visible in Nesbit's texts, it is ultimately difficult to state that Nesbit deliberately included them into her children's literature.

A secondary, quite unintentional, finding of this literary analysis is Nesbit's biographical influence on her texts. It is valid to state that Edith Nesbit reworked many experiences of her own life into her stories. For instance, the metaphor of the absent father and the fallen fortunes allude to Nesbit's father, who passed away in Nesbit's childhood, and to her husband's failed business. Based on the literary analysis it can be stated that Nesbit let herself very much inspire by her own life and environment. However, this finding requires more detailed research because I only superficially dealt with this issue when analysing the texts concerning social didacticism. Additionally, it would be interesting to examine other children's novels written by Edith Nesbit such as *The Story of the Amulet* or *The Wouldbegoods* with regard to social didacticism. Furthermore, the texts could be analysed in greater detail in terms of sex and gender roles. Gender takes on a very prominent role in the novel; however the underlying research question made it possible to superficially touch upon the subject. An in-depth analysis of the novels with regard to gender roles would be extremely intriguing.

In conclusion, the findings of the literary analysis remain quite contradictory which renders it impossible to make a definite and conclusive statement. Nevertheless, it can be stated that Nesbit, even though she was not as politically engaged as her husband, was indeed aware of the Fabian Society. This becomes most obvious in her novel *The Railway Children* where she includes a personification of socialism in the character of a Russian exile. In this context it has to be kept in mind that the effect of political and social input always depends on the individual reader. As pointed out in this thesis, the reader can completely ignore the ideological input, simply observe it or he or

she evaluates, rejects or adopts it. It is therefore impossible to state whether Nesbit's novels really influenced her readers and raised political and social awareness in them.

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7. APPENDIX

7.1 Appendix 1

THE FABIAN SOCIETY

17 Osnaburgh Street, Regent's Park Fabian Tract No. 2

A MANIFESTO

"For always in thine eyes, O liberty, Shines that high light whereby the world is saved; And though thou slay us, we will trust in thee."

London: George Standring 8 & 9 Finsbury Street, E.C. 1884.

A MANIFESTO

THE FABIANS are associated for spreading the following opinions held by them and discussing their practical consequences.

That under existing circumstances wealth cannot be enjoyed without dishonour or foregone without misery.

That it is the duty of each member of the State to provide for his or her wants by his or her own Labour.

That a life interest in the Land and Capital of the nation is the birthright of every individual born within its confines and that access to this birthright should not depend upon the will of any private person other than the person seeking it.

That the most striking result of our present system of farming out the national Land and Capital to private persons has been the division of Society into hostile classes, with large appetites and no dinners at one extreme and large dinners and no appetites at the other.

That the practice of entrusting the Land of the nation to private persons in the hope that they will make the best of it has been discredited by the consistency with which they have made the worst of it; and the Nationalisation of the Land in some form is a public duty.

That the pretensions of Capitalism to encourage Invention and to distribute its benefits in the fairest way attainable, have been discredited by the experience of the nineteenth century.

That, under the existing system of leaving the National Industry to organise itself Competition has the effect of rendering adulteration, dishonest dealing and inhumanity compulsory.

That since Competition amongst producers admittedly secures to the public the most satisfactory products, the State should compete with all its might in every department of production.

That such restraints upon Free Competition as the penalties for infringing the Postal monopoly, and the withdrawal of workhouse and prison labour from the markets, should be abolished.

That no branch of Industry should be carried on at a profit by the central administration.

That the Public Revenue should be levied by a direct Tax; and that the central administration should have no legal power to hold back for the replenishment of the Public Treasury any portion of the proceeds of Industries administered by them.

That the State should compete with private individuals - especially with parents – in providing happy homes for children, so that every child may have a refuge from the tyranny or neglect of its natural custodians.

That Men no longer need special political privileges to protect them against Women, and that sexes should henceforth enjoy equal political rights.

That no individual should enjoy any Privilege in consideration of services rendered to the State by his or her parents or relations.

That the State should secure a liberal education and an equal share in the National Industry to teach of its units.

That the established Government has no more right to call itself the State than the smoke of London has to call itself the weather.

That we had rather face a Civil War than such another century of suffering as present one has been.”

(Pease 28 – 30)

8. ABSTRACT

In this diploma thesis the three children's novels *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1888), *Five Children and It* (1902) and *The Railway Children* (1906) by the late Victorian writer Edith Nesbit will be analysed with regard to social didacticism. The term 'social didacticism' refers to the transmission of the author's social and political values to his or her readership. Edith Nesbit is known for her political engagement in the socialist Fabian Society, founded in 1884 in England. The main aim of the Society was to achieve equality among England's social classes. Simultaneously the organisation sought to counteract the bad social and economic conditions of the working classes, marked by poverty, bad hygienic conditions and insufficient payment. The first part of this thesis includes a historical background of late Victorian England. The aspects of economy, society and politics will be foregrounded. Afterwards the theoretical issue of ideologies in children's literature will be outlined. The theoretical background knowledge facilitates the understanding of the following literary analysis, which constitutes the main part of the diploma thesis. In the literary analysis, focusing on aspects such as narration, characterisation, language, gender, magical elements, structure and chronology, the three primary texts will be examined with regard to Nesbit's political and social values and beliefs. The underlying research question is therefore concerned with Nesbit's social and political ideology and to what extent she transmits it to her readers. The research findings will be presented in the conclusion.

9. ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In der vorliegenden Diplomarbeit werden die Kinderromane *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), *Five Children and It* (1902) und *The Railway Children* (1906) von der spätviktorianischen Schriftstellerin Edith Nesbit zum Thema soziale Didaktik analysiert. Der Begriff „soziale Didaktik“ umfasst die Vermittlung von sozialen sowie politischen Werten eines Autors an seine Leserschaft. Edith Nesbit ist bekannt für ihr Engagement in der sozialistischen Fabian Society, gegründet 1884 in England. Ziel der Organisation war es eine Gleichstellung der verschiedenen Gesellschaftsschichten Englands zu erreichen. Gleichzeitig sollte der schlechten wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage der Arbeiterschicht, gekennzeichnet durch Armut, schlechte Gesundheitspflege und zu niedriger Bezahlung, entgegengewirkt werden. Der erste Teil der Arbeit umfasst einen historischen Überblick über das spätviktorianische England. Dabei stehen die Bereiche Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft und Politik im Vordergrund. Anschließend wird die literarisch-theoretische Thematik der Ideologien in der Kinderliteratur erläutert. Dieses theoretische Hintergrundwissen ermöglicht eine bessere Nachvollziehbarkeit der Literaturanalyse, welche den Hauptteil der Diplomarbeit ausmacht. Im Zuge der Literaturanalyse, welche sich auf die literarischen Aspekte wie Erzählform, Charakterisierung, Sprache, Gender, Magie, Struktur und Chronologie stützt, werden die drei Texte im Bezug auf Nesbits politische Einstellung und ihre sozialen Normvorstellungen untersucht. Die vorliegende Forschungsfrage beschäftigt sich demnach mit Nesbits politischer und sozialer Ideologie und inwieweit sie diese ihren Leser/-innen übermittelt. Die Forschungsergebnisse werden in der Zusammenfassung dargestellt.

10. CURRICULUM VITAE

Details:

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Education:

1995-1999	Volksschule Breitenbrunn
1999-2007	Bundesgymnasium Neusiedl am See
June 2007	Reifeprüfung (A-levels)
From October 2007 onwards	Study at the University of Vienna – Lehramt UF Englisch, UF Französisch
September 2011 – March 2012	Exchange programme, Erasmus at MMU (Manchester Metropolitan University) in Manchester, United Kingdom

Work Experience:

August 2007 and 2008	Practical internship - Outlet Center Parndorf
August 2009	Aupair in France - Toulouse
August 2010	Tutor at Schülerhilfe Neusiedl/See (English and French)
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Qualifications:

University of Cambridge – Level 1, Certificate in English, Grade C

Participation in the “Language Olympics” in February 2007 in French and Spanish

Further Languages: Spanish – Level A1

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