The psychologist, the psychoanalyst and the 'extraordinary child' in postwar British science fiction

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Abstract

A sudden influx of portrayals of 'extraordinary children' emerged in British science fiction after the Second World War. Such children both violated and confirmed the new set of expectations about ordinary childhood that emerged from the findings of developmental psychologists around the same time. Previous work on extraordinary children in both science fiction and horror has tended to confine the phenomenon to an 'evil child boom' within the American filmmaking industry in the 1970s. This article suggests that a much earlier trend is visible in British post-war science fiction texts, analysing a cluster of novels that emerged in the 1950s: Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953), William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957). It will be argued that the groups of extraordinary children in these novels both tap into newer child-centred assertions about the threats posed by abnormal childhood, underwritten by psychology and psychoanalysis, and represent a reaction to an older progressive tradition in which children were envisaged as the single hope for a utopian future. This article will ultimately assert that the sudden appearance of extraordinary children in science fiction reflects a profound shift in assessment criteria for healthy childhood in Britain from the 1950s onwards, an issue that had become vitally important in a fledgling social democracy.

Concepts of healthy childhood, as evidenced by both educational theory and by practice in schools, changed profoundly in post-war Britain.[1] The significance of childhood was also heightened by the new expectations placed upon future citizens of a social democracy.[2] One manifestation of this shift was the sudden emergence of depictions of 'extraordinary' children in British science fiction, which engaged directly with the question of how normal children should behave, and how these extraordinary children both violate and confirm these biological and psychological norms. In some cases, extraordinary children are outright evil, either because of their supernatural powers or because of their natural lack of morality. However, they may be depicted less as malign than as 'other' in some way; either because of their separation from the adult world, or because of their divergence from the developmental sequence that adults expect from children. Such child-figures are almost entirely absent from British and US fiction until the Second World War, but became suddenly popular in the 1940s and 1950s.[3] They appeared first in novels in the 1950s then became even more common in British and American films in the 1960s, many of which were based on these earlier texts.[4] This article will focus upon three of the most popular and influential iterations of this trope in 1950s British science fiction: Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953), William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957).[5]

All three of these novels feature a group of threatening children who represent concerns about the future of the world as well as violating assumptions about 'ordinary' childhood. *Childhood's End* presents us with a group of children with extraordinary powers whom, it emerges, are a 'successor species' to their parents; the novel ends with the children leaving Earth with an advanced alien race, and finally destroying the planet. *Lord of the Flies* is, on the surface, very different, famously exploring the fate of a group of young castaways whose society breaks down into violence, but implying that such aggression is also found in adults. However, the choice of children as a 'case study' means that Golding engages with conceptions of childhood as well as making broader statements about humanity. Finally, in *The Midwich Cuckoos,* all the women of childbearing age in the village of Midwich mysteriously fall pregnant at the same time, and give birth to a set of children who come to be known as the 'Midwich cuckoos', or simply the Children. After the Children begin to react violently to any perceived threat, Professor Gordon Zellaby, a scientist who has taken a close interest in the group, realises that they must be destroyed to ensure humanity's safety, and sacrifices his own life in the process. The presentation of childhood in these novels, I will argue, was formed in dialogue with the image of childhood promoted by progressive educationalists, which all these authors encountered, but modulated by newer child-centred pedagogical ideas, which led to these equivocal portrayals of the next generation.

'I want education to produce the best that is in a child. That is the only way to improve the world', A.S. Neill wrote in 1918.[6] Three years later he founded Summerhill, a school which stood, above all else, for

'freedom' in education. Given a role in the government of their school, and not required to attend any lessons, Summerhill's pupils, Neill believed, would mature into a different kind of emotionally healthy adult, with the power to transform the future. The need for this new kind of education immediately after the First World War was spelt out by Bertrand Russell, who opened his own radical school, Beacon Hill, in 1927. As he wrote in his profoundly influential *On Education* (1926), young people who were brought up in a climate of 'fearless freedom' might avoid being 'twisted and stunted and terrified in youth, to be killed afterwards in futile wars.'[7] This was an attitude shared by a number of the progressive headteachers who would open their own private schools, form part of the New Education Fellowship (founded in 1921) and contribute to its journal, *New Era,* where Neill was an assistant editor. One of these progressives was John Haden Badley, who founded Bedales, the first co-educational boarding school in England, in 1893, well before the First World War, but adapted it increasingly to modern progressive practice in the 1920s – for example, using the Dalton Plan, which allowed pupils to plan and direct their own learning. Badley, who had started teaching at the 'first English progressive school', Cecil R. Reddie's Abbotsholme, shared the utopian vision for the future put forward by his fellows.[8] As he wrote in 1923, the child has to 'live his own life and to develop on lines laid down by nature rather than by the shortsightedness of his elders… We must enable our children not merely to take part in the world as it is, but to take their part also in bringing about a better state of things and preparing for the world as it may be.'[9]

As Robert Skidelsky argued in his early history of English progressive schools, such ideas and institutions flourished in the inter-war years but entered a rapid decline after the Second World War.[10] On the whole, however, historians of education have suggested that these early radicals were vindicated after 1945 because their ideas were taken up in 'mainstream' education as both primary and secondary modern schools became more 'child-centred'.[11] [12] [13] This analysis, however, ignores the fundamental differences between 'progressive' and 'child-centred' concepts of childhood, differences that shaped their visions of the future.[14] Progressives such as Neill, Russell and Badley believed that they were living in a society that was fundamentally distorted; children offered hope for the future because, if freed from the shackles of adult norms, they could reshape society in their own image. In contrast, child-centred educationalists assumed that the achievement of social democracy and the welfare state after the Second World War ought to be preserved, not destroyed. Children needed to be appropriately socialised by adult educators to ensure that they acquired the necessary physical, intellectual, social and emotional maturity to become full citizens of this collectivist state.[15] [16] [17] Child-centred pedagogy drew on a number of the methods utilised by progressives, including intelligence testing, greater freedom in the classroom, and psychoanalytical observation of pupils, but abandoned the progressive concept of childhood. In short, child-centred educationalists re-imagined children as limited and restricted by their immaturity, rather than potentially powerful because they were as yet undamaged by the world.

In order to fulfil its central mission of fitting the curriculum to the capabilities and interests of the child, child-centred education needed to draw upon a scientific body of knowledge that would tell them what children were like.[18] The findings of developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget and psychoanalysts such as Melanie Klein supplied this need after the Second World War, shaping child-centred concepts of childhood in three central ways. Firstly, childhood was conceptualised as a series of discontinuous maturational stages. The healthy, well-adjusted child would therefore acquire specific capacities and interests at set ages, and both precocity or 'backwardness' were seen as threats to normal development. Secondly, and following on from this, childhood was more decisively separated from adulthood, rather than viewed as part of a smoother continuum, as children were fundamentally defined by their age-group, whereas adults were not. Both these trends were expressed in the important and influential Plowden Report on English primary schools, published in 1967. [19] Finally, because social and emotional abilities were now viewed as an essential part of being a 'well-adjusted' child, children's interactions with their peer groups assumed far greater importance, and play became an object of study and of observation, as well as a part of the new progressive curriculum.[20] Unlike child-centred educationalists, however, progressives were not committed to these assertions about the nature of the child because their central aim was not to redesign the curriculum to suit children; as Neill commented in 1937, he had 'no interest in how children learn'.[21]

'Before the second world war I believed in the perfectibility of social man; that a correct structure of society would produce goodwill; and that therefore you could remove all social ills by a reorganisation of society. It is possible that today I believe something of the same again; but after the war I did not because I was unable to,' Golding reflected in 1965, spelling out how he had once been inspired by something akin to the progressive vision of the future, but how this was no longer the case during the period when he was writing *Lord of the Flies*.[22] The 'extraordinary' children that appeared in British science fiction after 1945 seem to have been influenced by both progressive and child-centred ideas about childhood – as my consideration of their writers' own experiences within the British education system will demonstrate. Clarke, Golding and Wyndham's presentation of these groups of children suggest that they shared the progressive sense of confidence that the next generation may remake society, rather than simply reflect it. However, these texts also engage with child-centred ideas of childhood insofar as they define the 'extraordinary' child in relation to the 'ordinary' child, and suggest that both are inherently problematic; the treatment of children's play within the novels also reflects psychoanalytical thinking about child development. Therefore, I contend that this kind of extraordinary child only became possible because of the influence of developmental psychology on concepts of normal childhood, and that such fictional depictions formed part of the growing dominance of this child-centred image of childhood in postwar Britain.

There has been little written on the presentation of children in post-war science fiction.[23] Children are occasionally mentioned in wider histories of science fiction, and wider social and cultural explanations for their increased prevalence may be suggested, but no thorough analysis is pursued.[24] [25] [26] [27] [28] [29]What discussion of extraordinary children that does exist focuses on American horror films of the 1970s, when the success of *The Exorcist* (1973) spawned a sequence of similar US movies that have been dubbed 'the demon child cycle' or the 'evil child boom' by historians of cinematic horror.[30] [31] [32] [33] [34] However, the terminology of a sudden 'boom' complicates the issue in two ways; firstly, it suggests that the 'extraordinary child' was a solely American phenomenon, and secondly, it emphasises the ways in which these movies used the tried-and-tested commercial formula of a demonic child to boost ticket sales, suggesting that the trope reflected little about society other than its desire to see the same story replayed. However, such children had appeared in British fiction long before, suggesting how common the 'extraordinary child' was before *The Exorcist* made the idea fashionable; that it was as common in British novels as American movies, and as frequent in science fiction as in horror; and that the sudden explosion of these depictions in the 1950s was therefore not simply a commercial trend but a reflection of deeper societal changes in the significance and definition of childhood.

Clarke, Golding and Wyndham

Clarke, Golding and Wyndham all formed their ideas about childhood in reaction to progressive educational ideas, although the degree of contact they had with progressivism varied. Both Golding and Wyndham had direct, practical experience of progressive schools. Golding's career as a schoolmaster began in 1935 at Michael Hall, a Steiner school in Surrey. Steiner education was poised awkwardly between progressive and child-centred concepts of childhood. Its founder, Rudolf Steiner, shared the conviction of child-centred educators that children were limited by their developmental stage, and that teachers have to help children overcome these problems so they can achieve 'conscious and responsible adulthood'. However, he also believed that children possessed spiritual qualities that adults cannot access, having recently left the 'divine world'.[35] As John Carey notes, Golding rejected the Steiner system after teaching at Michael Hall for two years, stating it was 'farcical'. However, he engaged with other iterations of progressive philosophy during this period, primarily the works of the German social psychologist Erich Fromm.[36] Golding's statements about education and childhood later in his career indicated the influence of both progressive and child-centred thought: in 1965, for example, he wrote that in *Lord of the Flies* 'mature council and authority might have saved [the boys] as on so many occasions we might have saved our own children, might have been saved ourselves'.[37] Hence, like progressive educators, he acknowledged the hopelessness of man's current state, but, unlike the progressives, suggested that children had even fewer answers – and, indeed, would benefit from adult

guidance. These statements indicate that although *Lord of the Flies* is about fallen man, it has a special concern with childhood – perhaps because Golding was explicitly attacking Steiner-esque ideas of childhood 'innocence'. Golding famously claimed to have remarked to his wife when planning the novel: 'Wouldn't it be a good idea if I wrote a book about children on an island, children who behave in the way children really would behave?'[38] In a later interview with Carey, he suggested that the 'sickness' of childhood made children especially prone to committing evil acts: 'I think because children are helpless and vulnerable, the most terrible things can be done by children to children'.[39]

In contrast with Golding's mixed response to progressive ideas, John Wyndham, who spent part of his adolescence at Badley's Bedales, arriving at the school in 1918, recalled the experience as wholly positive. Wyndham's biographer, David Ketterer, has argued that his time at Bedales was the key influence on his life.[40] As we have seen, Bedales, like other progressive schools, though founded before the First World War, was reshaped thereafter by the resurgence in progressive thought sparked by the experience of the war, and the deaths of so many young men. As one male teacher who came to the school in 1919 recalled: 'the four years' slaughter of those boys whom we had helped to send to their deaths convinced me of two things: first, that the main idea that lay behind what we tried to teach them was irrational, and secondly, that it was futile'.[41] Like Golding, Wyndham encountered child-centred as well as progressive ideas at Bedales – most notably, mental testing, which was used at the school from 1921, and which was to play a crucial part in *The Midwich Cuckoos*.[42] As Ketterer points out, Bedales was likely a direct model for the school that the Children attend in the novel, which the Chief Constable of Midwich describes critically: 'I've heard of those fancy schools. Children mustn't be what-do-you-callit?—frustrated. Self-expression, co-education, wholemeal bread, and all the rest of it'.[43] Zellaby describes it as a 'kind of school-cum-welfare-centre-cum-social-observatory'.[44] Hence, despite Wyndham's own respect for Bedales, the school is positioned uncomfortably in the novel, because it is ultimately unable to contain or moderate the children's violence – reflecting contemporary doubts about the value of progressivism.

In contrast to Golding and Wyndham, Clarke had no direct contact with progressive education himself. However, like Wyndham, he was strongly influenced by the science fiction of Olaf Stapledon, an inter-war British writer who drew on progressive themes, especially in his depiction of childhood and youth.[45] Stapledon attended Abbotsholme, the precursor to Bedales, where he was in close communication with Reddie in his role as a prefect and head boy; in Reddie's 'ideal miniature kingdom', like Neill's, the staff and boys shared authority. As Robert Crossley has argued, 'Abbotsholme permanently marked Olaf's character and his distinct way of looking at the world'.[46] Stapledon himself went on to write several novels featuring remarkable children, most notably *Last Men in London* (1932) and *Odd John* (1935). However, Stapledon's depictions of these infant 'supermen' differ from post-war

extraordinary children – as do even earlier iterations such as H.G. Wells's *Food of the Gods* (1904) and J.D. Beresford's *The Hampdenshire Wonder* (1911) – because unlike later texts, they are solely influenced by progressive, rather than child-centred thought. Children are figured as the hope for the future, not as a problem that needs to be solved. As George Johnson has argued in relation to the Wells and Beresford texts, 'both novels ironically use exceptional children to expose the immature, flawed characteristics of adults'.[47] A similar argument could be made in relation to Stapledon, who has the superchild Humphry, almost ruined by his poor upbringing, say in *Last Men in London* that 'What I must do is make a new world.'[48] He fails to create the island utopia he had planned but Odd John, in the novel of that name, succeeds in founding such a community before he is destroyed by ignorant adults.[49] In contrast, the groups of children presented by Clarke, Golding and Wyndham are more likely to be humanity's ruin than its salvation.

The extraordinary child, the psychologist and the psychoanalyst

Why did child-centred education, underwritten by developmental psychology, produce such restrictive concepts of childhood? The idea that child development could be best understood as a sequence of discrete stages was not pioneered by inter-war developmental psychologists such as Piaget. 'Recapitulation', or the suggestion that the growing child repeats the history of the race, was a popular psychological theory in the late nineteenth century, and allowed for a number of different divisions to be suggested, most notably by the American psychologist G. Stanley Hall in his *Adolescence* (1904).[50] However, Piaget's meticulous experiments allowed each stage to be defined by much clearer criteria than Hall had utilised, and he was to become the most significant influence on British post-war pedagogy.[51] As his work developed across several decades, he identified sequential stages in a wide range of aspects of child development, ranging from moral to mathematical to linguistic to social.[52] [53] [54] The complex nature of Piaget's work meant that his arguments were often misunderstood by teachers, and even by educational theorists and advisers.[55] Piaget suggested that his stages should not be seen as strictly linked to chronological ages, that bright children might progress through the stages more swiftly, and that there is no dividing line that marks off childhood from adulthood. '[A]fter having tried to describe the child's mentality as distinct from the adult's,' Piaget admits in *The Moral Judgement of the Child*, 'we have found ourselves obliged to include it in our descriptions of the adult mind in so far as the adult still remains a child.' [56]

However, rather than acknowledging the variation within the stage-concepts presented by Piaget, government reports, teaching advice guides and teaching journals in post-war Britain tended to present stages as fixed and rigidly sequential, attached to chronological (rather than developmental) ages and inapplicable to adults. [57] The increasing influence of developmental stages was demonstrated by the

practical re-organisation of schooling in post-war Britain. As suggested by its nickname, 'Hadow reorganisation' of schools into distinct infant, primary and secondary departments had been suggested by the Hadow Report of 1931, although all-age elementaries persisted into the post-war period. Nevertheless, after 1945, teachers and inspectors became more concerned with preventing large age-ranges, separating juniors and seniors, and ensuring that teachers had been trained for, or had had experience of teaching, the age-group that they worked with, although in practice, teachers frequently taught a range of age-groups. More broadly, as progressive ideas came to dominate primary schools from the 1950s, teachers often encountered second-hand versions of Piaget's ideas that over-simplified his theories. For example, we can trace the utilisation in teaching guides of the idea that children under eleven were 'unable to reason,' which misinterprets Piaget's statements about the concrete operational stage, making it into the kind of rigid age-related category described above. [58]

Additionally, and importantly, by tightening the definition of developmental stages in this way, more popular uses of this term suggested that both precocious and 'backward' children were endangering their own adjustment, because it was impossible to accelerate ahead of your age-group in one area without risking your health elsewhere. For example, it was frequently suggested that intellectually gifted children must be lacking in social development. Most larger schools had a separate class for 'backward pupils' by 1945; as logbook evidence shows, in extreme cases, a child might be sent to a special school. [59] [60] 'Gifted' pupils, while supposedly sought after, could also be seen as difficult cases, as *Teachers World* indicates: 'Jason' stated in 1952 that he disapproved of marking because '[i]t contributes to the smugness of bright children', while in 1954, 'Essem' [for S.M. or sec. mod.], one of the more traditional editors, remembered a teacher who wanted to have a C class as 'the A people are inclined to be a bit cocky; and I can't stand cocky people.' [61] In 1962, Christopher Sly, an educational psychologist, argued that 'an attitude towards gifted children which is akin to resentment' was not uncommon among teachers. [62]

This rigidity is reflected in depictions of extraordinary children, who are abnormal because they overshoot developmental expectations. The Midwich Children are both physically and intellectually advanced for their age. When Zellaby tries an intelligence test consisting of a box-puzzle on one of the Children, the fact that they possess a hive mind means that all the other Children can instantly solve it, due to their 'multiplication of intelligence'. [63] Having raced past key developmental targets such as learning to read and to ride a bicycle, at the age of nine, they appear fully physically mature. [64] 'That alone set them right apart as a different species', he muses, '… it was development at almost twice normal rate.' [65] Similarly, the children in *Childhood's End* stop behaving like ordinary children as they acquire their strange powers, becoming fully self-sufficient. Their lack of dependency on adults

removes them from the category of normal childhood altogether when they leave the planet: 'These who were leaving no were no longer children, whatever they might be.'[66]

The tests used in these novels, such as the box-puzzle, would have been familiar to teachers in post-war Britain, used as tools of assessment to define whether or not a child was developing normally. The Ministry of Education formally introduced the school record card from 1947, which included space for the teacher to note down information about the child's personality characteristics as well as his or her academic achievements; this card was increasingly used in schools from this date onwards, as journals and teaching guides indicate. [67 68 69 70 71] Intelligence tests were also used in a slight majority of LEAs from the inter-war period onwards, as Gill Sutherland's work demonstrates. [72] Children were also frequently used for research studies by students of education; schools in cities such as Cambridge were particularly likely to receive such visitors, due to their proximity to the prestigious teacher training colleges, such as Homerton. To take just one example, children in Park Street School were used for at least seven research projects from 1962-66, including a 'treatise on Children's logic', 'schizophrenic research', 'reactions… to various media', 'spelling difficulties' and 'work on Children's Spatial Concepts', as recorded by the headteacher. [73] Educational psychologists were also making regular visits to schools by the 1960s, as logbook entries from Oxfordshire, Sheffield and Monmouthshire, as well as Cambridgeshire, demonstrate, normalising IQ testing and other forms of psychological assessment and emphasising the need for children to fit certain criteria on developmental scales.[74 75 76 77 78] Extraordinary children's accelerated intelligence, therefore, fits into familiar practices but is clearly defined as problematic, especially when related to their uneven social development.

In postwar Britain, observing children's play became another crucial way of assessing their relationships with their peer group, and hence their social health. Valerie Walkerdine gives an example from a nursery school record card that reflects the type of categories used, 'Is his play isolated, parallel, associative, co-operative, group?', with the suggestion that co-operative and group play are more developmentally advanced. [79] *Lord of the Flies* presents its boys as initially 'normal' by linking them with hide-and-seek, choral chanting, and tag, all forms of play that degenerate into anarchy as social order begins to break down. Golding suggested that he had based his characters on the observations that he had made in the classroom, reflecting psychoanalytical strictures to record the social behaviour of the class. In an interview in 1980, he stated that 'it is equally true to say that being a schoolmaster and seeing boys of the same age as those on the island daily for a number of years, taught me a good deal about their behaviour or rather reminded me of their behaviour'. [80] Golding did not only passively observe the behaviour of his pupils, but, as he admitted in a 1961 lecture, deliberately intervened in a surprisingly progressive manner for a grammar schoolmaster, perhaps reflecting his early experience as a Steiner teacher.

In this interview, he suggested that he had experimented with 'freedom' in education, as he wanted to know what would happen if his pupils had more liberty. The picture he painted was disturbing: 'Well, I gave them more liberty… and more, and more, and more – I drew further away. My eyes came out like organ stops as I watched what was happening.'[81] Play in *Lord of the Flies* therefore becomes one way of demonstrating the true nature of children. Similarly, Clarke uses ideas of play in *Childhood's End* to encapsulate the separation between child and adult minds; as Jeff, one of the children, engages further with the 'dream world' that is transforming him, he ceases to be frightened because 'it was only a game.'[82] Clarke may have been influenced here by Lewis Padgett's earlier short story 'Mimsy are the Borogroves' (1943), which he called 'one of the finest – and most chilling – pieces of fiction ever to appear in [*Astounding*]'.[83] Padgett's story focuses on children who get hold of alien toys, and, having been utterly altered by what they have learnt by playing with these toys, disappear. 'All children are mad, from an adult viewpoint', a child psychologist tells their horrified parents, emphasising how play divides children and adults even further.[84]

The one way in which extraordinary children cleave closely to expectations for ordinary children is in their strong group bonds. In 1950, the Sheffield Education Committee issued their 'Explanatory notes for the completion of the school record card', which enjoined teachers to record the child's personal qualities 'in relation to the class or activity group of which he is a member.'[85] This new focus on the significance of relationships within the peer-group reflects the separation of extraordinary children from the world of adults. This is most obvious in *The Midwich Cuckoos*, where the Children are eventually removed from their families to attend 'Bedales'. They are always seen in groups as they move around the village, and their identical appearance contributes to their eeriness. In both *The Midwich Cuckoos* and *Childhood's End,* the children possess a hive mind: at the Midwich school, 'any lesson is attended by one boy and one girl, and all the rest know what those two have been taught',[86] whereas in *Childhood's End*, 'their faces were merging into a common mould' as they become part of 'the Overmind'.[87] In *Lord of the Flies*, no adults appear until the very end of the novel, but the viewpoint of the naval officer is used to emphasise the fact that no adult will ever truly understand what took place on this island, as it is only comprehensible to children. As the boys burst into tears in front of the naval officer, Golding seems to suggest that the truth of what happened on this island will never emerge.[88]

The inability of adults to ever fully understand children highlights a final theme that these texts share. Overall, although psychological tests and categories are used to define the abnormality of extraordinary children, they cannot solve the problem that they pose, and so reflect the ultimate impotence of the adult developmental psychologist. As Jason Colavito has argued, science fiction maintains a special link with developing scientific knowledge, engaging as it does with 'humanity's uneasy relationship with its

own ability to reason, to understand, and to know'. Scientists, as arbiters of biological, chemical or physical knowledge, become recurring characters throughout late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century horror. [89] They appear either as antagonists in the 'mad scientist' mould, unable to control their creations or even understand what they have done, or as authority figures who explain and analyse the horror to our heroes. Where the horror is in child form, however, traditional scientists cede their position to psychologists and psychiatrists, suggesting that these experts have either helped to create the extraordinary child or can do nothing to stop it. In *The Midwich Cuckoos,* the 'social psychologists' who are 'appointed to instruct and guide the children' are ultimately unable to stop the violent feud between them and the villagers, and prevent Zellaby's necessary sacrifice. [90] In *Childhood's End,* similarly, Jeff's visit to the child psychologist cannot help him with the bad dreams that precede his transformation: 'There's nothing on his [record] card to suggest any mental abnormality. So just accept it, and don't worry'. [91] Despite the assertions of developmental psychologists, increased knowledge does not bring increased power.

Conclusion

Developmental psychology increasingly emphasised the importance of the child's emotional and social development in post-war Britain, extending the number of axes upon which a child's normality could be judged by asserting that simply measuring physical and intellectual fitness was not sufficient to ensure the health of the population in a social democracy, which required more of its citizens. [92] [93] Depictions of 'extraordinary children' are notable in this respect because they represent both the dangers of accelerated development alongside a range of characteristics that were seen as important for ordinary children. Physically and intellectually, extraordinary children violate norms. But emotionally and socially, their close bonds with their peer group and separation from the world of adults fit into emerging concepts of what was normal for pre-pubescent children, although their inability to play, or their perversion of ordinary games, demonstrates the cost of their accelerated development. All three texts are ultimately ambivalent or wholly negative about the value of the new generation. *The Midwich Cuckoos* and *Childhood's End* suggest that these children may be the future, but that this comes at the expense of adults. While the children's extraordinary abilities might have been seen as valuable, as in earlier 'superman' texts, in post-war science fiction they are viewed as dangerous and uncanny. The 'ordinary' children in *Lord of the Flies,* despite their lack of supernatural powers, are also othered by virtue of their age; they share adults' fallen nature, but are even less able to control their own violent urges. Nevertheless, because these texts tap into the progressive belief that the next generation will transform the world, they paint a bleak picture for humanity. Extraordinary children, therefore, reflect adult fears about children's limitations, suggesting that the health of the new generation, and hence of the British state, was by no means assured.

[1] Tisdall L. Inside the 'blackboard jungle': male teachers and male pupils in English secondary modern schools in fact and fiction, 1950-1959, *Cultural and Social History* 2016; 12.4.

[2] Thomson M. Lost freedom: the landscape of the child and the British post-war settlement. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013: 12-13.

[3] The trope emerged first in short stories in 'pulp' science-fiction magazines before becoming mainstream in novels. Key examples, other than the three under discussion, include: John Collier, 'Thus I Refute Beelzy' (1941), Lewis Padgett, 'Mimsy Were The Borogroves' (1943), Robert Bloch, 'Sweets to the Sweet' (1947), Ray Bradbury, 'The Small Assassin' and 'Let's Play Poison' (1948), 'Zero Hour', 'The Playground', and 'The Veld' (1952), Richard Matheson, 'Born of Man and Woman' (1950), Jerome Bixby, 'It's A *Good* Life' (1952), Theodore Sturgeon, *More Than Human* (1953), Wilmar H. Shiras, *Children of the Atom* (1954) and H.L. Lawrence, *Children of Light* (1960).

[4] *Village of the Damned* (1960), *The Innocents* (1961), *Children of the Damned* (1963), *The Damned* (1963), *Lord of the Flies* (1963), and *A High Wind in Jamaica* (1965). As this indicates, the two most notable depictions of extraordinary children in print that appeared before the Second World War – Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and Richard Hughes's *A High Wind in Jamaica* (1929) – were not filmed until the 1960s, and so formed part of this wave.

[5] It may seem strange to classify *Lord of the Flies* as science fiction, but – apart from the fact that the original draft begins with a futuristic nuclear war – it was often received as such at the time; for example, it won third prize in the International Fantasy Award. See Carey J. William Golding: the man who wrote *Lord of the Flies*: a life. London: Faber and Faber 2009: 154, 209.

[6] Cited in Selleck R.J.W. English primary education and the progressives, 1914-1939. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1972: 94.

[7] Cited in Selleck R.J.W. English primary education and the progressives, 1914-1939. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1972: 97.

[8] Skidelsky R. English progressive schools. Middlesex: Penguin 1969: 14.

[9] Badley J.H. Bedales: a pioneer school. London: Methuen 1923: 30, 206.

[10] Skidelsky R. English progressive schools. Middlesex: Penguin 1969: 243.

[11] Lowe R. The death of progressive education: how teachers lost control of the classroom. London: Routledge 2007.

[12] Jones K. Beyond progressive education. London: Macmillan 1983.

[13] Howlett J. Progressive education: a critical introduction. London: Bloomsbury Academic 2013.

[14] This terminology is my own. Existing historiography does not tend to use 'progressive' or 'child-centred' in this sense, but I contend that using the words interchangeably is confusing.

[15] Catty N. Learning and teaching in the junior school. London: Methuen 1941.

[16] Daniel M.V. Activity in the primary school. Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1947.

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