

## 69. Edith Nesbit's contemporary fairy tales: The influence of childhood experiences on artistic manifestation

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### Abstract

This research conducts a comprehensive examination of the influence exerted by early life experiences on an author's literary corpus, with a particular emphasis on Edith Nesbit (1858-1924), the author of children's novel, and her incorporation of childhood memories to enrich the contemporary fairy tale genre. Utilizing Melanie Klein's (1882-1960) theoretical framework, a renowned Austrian-British psychoanalyst, the investigation endeavours to deliver an exhaustive analysis of Nesbit's artistic persona. Nesbit's children's narratives, as modern fairy tales, embody an internal realm of unconscious reverie akin to Klein's concept of phantasy. Central to Nesbit's tales are young protagonists who confront challenges associated with separation from caregivers, the establishment of identity, reality appraisal, body image maturation, and object relations. Edith Nesbit's harrowing childhood experiences shaped her into the imaginative author she ultimately became. By delving into the realm of fantasy and creativity, Nesbit achieved a sense of completeness and resilience, allowing her to overcome her feelings of loss and vulnerability. This research aims to shed light on the complex link between a writer's formative years and their creative expressions by examining the remnants of Nesbit's early life experiences. Furthermore, by emphasizing Edith Nesbit's ability to transform her experiences into her artistic body of work, this study also demonstrates the power of artistic expression as a means of self-exploration and healing.

**Keywords:** childhood, fairy tale, Melanie Klein, phantasy, Edith Nesbit

## Edith Nesbit'in çağdař peri masalları: Çocukluk deneyimlerinin yaratıcı ifade üzerindeki etkisi

### Öz

Bu arařtırma, bir yazarın edebi mirası üzerinde erken yařam deneyimlerinin etkisini incelemektedir. Özellikle İngiliz Edebiyatı çocuk hikâyeleri yazarı Edith Nesbit'in çocukluk anılarını çağdař masal türünü zenginleřtirecek şekilde eserlerine nasıl dahil ettiđine odaklanmaktadır. Ünlü Avusturyalı İngiliz psikanalist Melanie Klein'in (1882-1960) teorik çerçevesini kullanarak, bu inceleme Nesbit'in sanatsal kiřiliđinin bir analizini sunmayı hedeflemektedir. Nesbit'in çocuk hikâyeleri, modern masallar olarak tanımlanır ve Klein'in fantezi kavramına benzer şekilde bilinçaltı hayalinin bir iç dünyasını temsil eder. Nesbit'in hikâyelerinin merkezinde, ailelerinden ayrılma ile iliřkili zorluklarla yüzleřen, kimlik oluřturma, gerçeklik deđerlendirmesi, kiřilik olgunlařması ve obje iliřkileri gibi konuları ele alan genç kahramanlar bulunmaktadır. Edith Nesbit'in sarsıcı çocukluk deneyimleri, onu hayal gücü yüksek bir yazar şekline dönüřtürdü. Fantezi ve yaratıcılık alanına dalarak, Nesbit, tamamlanmışlık ve dirençlilik hissini elde etti ve böylece kayıp ve kırılğanlık duygularını aşmayı

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başardı. Bu araştırma, Nesbit'in erken yaşam deneyimlerinin kalıntılarını inceleyerek, bir yazarın gelişim yılları ile yaratıcı ifadeleri arasındaki karmaşık bağları aydınlatmayı hedeflemektedir. Ayrıca, Edith Nesbit'in deneyimlerini sanatsal eserlerine dönüştürme yeteneğine vurgu yaparak, aynı zamanda sanatsal ifadenin, kendini keşfetme ve iyileşme aracı olarak gücünü de göstermektedir. Nesbit'in çocukluk hayal dünyasının, çağdaş masal türünü zenginleştirmek için nasıl etkili bir şekilde kullanıldığına dair bir değerlendirme de yapmaktadır. Bu analiz, Nesbit'in edebi üretimindeki anahtar öğeleri ve onun sanatsal kişiliğinin nasıl geliştiğini anlama yolunda bize rehberlik etmektedir. Nesbit'in hikâyelerinin çocukluk deneyimlerine, özellikle de onun kişisel yaşamındaki zorluklara ve çatışmalara nasıl ışık tuttuğunu göstermeye çalışmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** çocukluk, hayal dünyası, masal, Melanie Klein, Edith Nesbit

## Introduction

Artists possess a unique talent to convert their individual dreams and subconscious desires into art forms that are able to strike a chord with a broad audience. Sigmund Freud, the pioneer of psychoanalysis, was one of the early advocates of this concept. In an 1897 letter to his close friend, the German physician Wilhelm Fliess, Freud employed the tale of Oedipus Rex from Greek mythology as an analogy to underline his theory. Freud asserted that this mythological narrative strikes a chord with many because it uncovers a universal subconscious urge that take source from personal fantasies (1985, p. 297). He proposed that artists, by tapping into these omnipresent fantasies, transform them into an artistic output that speaks to a global audience. In 1908, Freud further expanded on this theory by stating that artists adopt specific strategies to reshape their intimate fantasies into art with a broader appeal (1959, p.153). He claimed that they modify and mask these personal fantasies to render them more acceptable to the wider public, while providing their audience with aesthetic enjoyment through the representation of these fantasies. Renowned American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Harry Trosman further delved into the importance of childhood fantasies in the lives and works of artists. Trosman posited that the artwork often becomes a metamorphosis of subconscious fantasy, whether it depicts a dynamic of wish-defence conflict or a portrayal of the underlying framework that sustains such dynamics (1990, p. 60). Elements of early life experiences, such as fantasies, dreams, and emotional experiences, are instrumental in shaping an artist's creative journey. The creative process is significantly influenced by the artist's ability to convert personal fantasies into universally appealing art. The artistic impulse to devise a representation of a new world is driven by the longing to discover a "symbolic expression" that resurrects a once lost utopia of bliss (Philips and Stnebridge, 1998, p.220). This symbolic representation is connected to the artist's subconscious fantasies, desires, fears, and guilt, which may find symbolic manifestation in their art. Thus, the creative identity of an artist is intricately linked to their life experiences, personal viewpoints, and emotional states. They create a realm in their art that mirrors their unique vision and internal universe. As such, two authors writing about the same society would paint vastly differing pictures, shaped by their personal experiences, ideologies, and emotions.

The creative identity of Edith Nesbit's, an English author and poet known primarily for her work in children's literature, was inextricably tied to her personal encounters, aspirations, apprehensions, and remorse. Through her literary works, she fashioned a new world that reflected her childhood experiences, unique perspective, and inner world, offering a symbolic expression of her desires and emotions. Edith Nesbit's exceptional contributions to children's literature, particularly her incorporation of fantasy within the modern fairy tale tradition, have left an indelible mark on the genre.

Her works, celebrated by readers of all ages, have played an influential role in shaping the modern fairy tale genre. Nesbit's stories often weave together magical elements with a unique blend of humour, adventure, and social commentary. Her ability to create relatable characters and incorporate contemporary settings made her stories accessible to children, contributing to the popularity of the modern fairy tale genre. Many cherished childhood stories were penned by Nesbit, with her magical tales transporting young readers to ancient Egypt, Babylon, and the lost city of Atlantis. Her depiction of a utopian London filled with happiness and wisdom instilled hope in the hearts of children. Nesbit's stories allowed each child to discover their own world of memories and fantasies. Her magical adventures evoked a sense of wonder and possibility, making readers feel as though these extraordinary experiences could happen to them. Through her innovative approach to storytelling, Nesbit established a captivating and enduring style of writing that continues to enchant readers and shape the world of children's literature.

Beyond numerous psychoanalytic theories, Melanie Klein's concept of the imaginary realm bears significant parallels to Edith Nesbit's style of fantasy writing. Klein believed that children's early experiences and relationships shape their internal phantasy worlds, which consist of a complex network of thoughts, feelings, and desires that are separate from external reality (2004, p. 79). These phantasies can be both positive and negative and can influence a child's emotional development and behaviour. In her fantasy writing, Nesbit often creates intricate and imaginative new worlds that are separate from external reality, much like a child's phantasy world. These worlds consist of sometimes positive and sometimes negative experiences and emotions of Nesbit's own memories. The use of fantastical elements, such as magic, mythical creatures, and alternate realities, allow Nesbit to explore her complex emotions and themes in a unique and engaging way. Additionally, like a child's phantasy world, Edith's fantasy writing often involves the exploration of power and control. In fantasy stories, Nesbit's characters may wield magical powers or face formidable opponents, reflecting the writer's own desires and fears surrounding power and control. Melanie Klein's theory of the phantasy world overlaps Klein's fantasy writing including the creation of imaginative worlds separate from external reality, the exploration of power and control, and the importance of play and imagination in emotional development.

The childhood dreams of Edith Nesbit had a profound impact on her literature for young audiences. Nesbit incorporated her personal childhood escapades, family narratives, and whimsical notions into the creation of her imaginative universe. In her children's stories, Nesbit's modern fairy tales represent an internal world of unconscious fantasy that is similar to the world of phantasy described by Klein. Nesbit's stories often involve children as main characters who face challenges related to separation from caregivers, identity formation, reality testing, body image development, and object relations. These issues are similar to the important developmental issues that children face and are addressed through the use of unconscious fantasies in Nesbit's stories. The children in her stories often go on adventures and encounter magical beings and creatures, which reflects Nesbit's own childhood fantasies. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, French psychoanalysts and collaborators who significantly contributed to the development of psychoanalytic theory, liken primary fantasies to myths in their ability to provide solutions to important mysteries and vital affairs of children (2003, p.105). Primary fantasies are deeply rooted, unconscious mental images or themes that emerge during early childhood, often reflecting universal human experiences and developmental issues. In the context of Nesbit's stories, it is suggested that her works embody the concept of primary fantasies, as they often address important developmental issues and provide solutions through the use of magical elements and unconscious fantasies. By incorporating these elements, Nesbit's stories may resonate with readers on a deeper, more

subconscious level, reflecting and addressing the emotional and psychological challenges faced by children during their development.

Furthermore, the dynamic relationships between internal objects and the ego in Nesbit's stories reflect Klein's concept of phantasy. The children in her stories often interact with magical objects and creatures, which serve as symbols for their internal conflicts and desires. By incorporating these elements into her stories, Nesbit was able to create a world that mirrored the internal world of not only herself but also her readers and provided them with a sense of validation and understanding. In turn, Nesbit's childhood fantasies serve as the foundation for her children's stories, which incorporate important developmental issues and magical elements to create a rich and engaging narrative for children. By drawing on her own experiences and fantasies, Nesbit creates stories that spoke directly to children's internal worlds and helped them navigate the complex issues they face during development.

The purpose of this study is relating Edith Nesbit's creative identity to Melanie Klein's theory which highlights the role of fantasy and play in children's development. Klein believed that children use fantasy and play to work through their emotions and to understand the world around them (Adler, 2014, p.183). Nesbit's narratives overflow with creativity and fantasy, skilfully intertwining wit, daring escapades, and insightful societal observations. In this sense, this study has illuminated the profound connection between Edith Nesbit's creative identity and Melanie Klein's theory on the importance of fantasy and play in children's development. Nesbit's vividly inventive tales are marked by their blend of humour, excitement, and perceptive societal reflections and provide a perfect backdrop for young readers to explore their emotions and make sense of the world around them. By examining this relationship, we not only gain a deeper understanding of Nesbit's literary contributions but also appreciate the lasting impact of Klein's insights on the significance of fantasy and play as essential tools in children's emotional growth and cognitive development. Ultimately, the fusion of Nesbit's storytelling and Klein's theory underscores the enduring power and value of children's literature in shaping young minds and fostering emotional resilience.

### **Foundations of identity: Object relations theory and early childhood experiences**

According to object relations theory, our early childhood experiences play a critical role in shaping our personality and identity. There is a close connection between an individual's internal sense of self and their relationships with external objects and subjects, including caregivers and family members (Grotstein, 1995, p. 89-129). From birth onwards, individuals are constantly in the process of relating to external objects and subjects. The presence of others in our lives is inevitable and shapes the development of our sense of self. Melanie Klein asserts that the first external subject that an individual relates to is typically their mother or primary caregiver, who is perceived as fragmented parts during the first few months of life (1998, p. 7). The mother or primary caregiver plays a crucial role in providing a sense of balance and security for the infant. They help the infant navigate the anxieties of the inner world and provide emotional warmth and security in the environment of the young child. The caregiver, often the mother, plays a crucial role in moulding an individual's internal working models during early childhood, significantly influencing their interpersonal relationships and interactions throughout their lifetime (Grotstein, 1995, p.92). Early experiences with caregivers can lead to the development of internal working models of self and others, which shape our expectations and beliefs about relationships. These internal working models can influence our patterns of attachment, intimacy, and emotional regulation, and can have a significant impact on the development of our personality and identity. For instance, when a child consistently receives emotional warmth and support from their primary

caregiver, they are more likely to develop a positive internal working model of themselves and others. This can then lead to the formation of secure attachments and the nurturing of healthy relationships in their later life. On the other hand, a child who experiences inconsistent or negative emotional responses from their caregiver may develop an insecure internal working model, which can lead to the development of anxious or avoidant attachment patterns and difficulties in relationships. Early childhood experiences are crucial in shaping an individual's sense of agency and autonomy. The development of a strong sense of self requires a balance between the need for attachment and the need for autonomy. A caregiver who provides appropriate levels of emotional support and encourages independence and self-expression can help to support healthy emotional development and the development of a positive sense of self. As a result, object relations theory highlights the critical role of early childhood experiences in shaping an individual's personality, identity, and relationships with others. Any disturbances in this area can have immediate and far-reaching effects on the child's self-perception and emotional development. By understanding the complex and multifaceted ways in which early experiences can shape our sense of self and our interactions with others, we can better support healthy emotional development in children and promote the development of positive and resilient identities.

The imaginative world of children is a mirror of childhood experiences. It is reflection of a child's internal struggles or unmet needs and may be a sign that the child is not receiving the level of support and care they need from their caregivers. In some cases, excessive reliance on an imaginative world may be a coping mechanism for dealing with a lack of support or stability in the child's real-world environment. Children who experience neglect, abuse, trauma, or other forms of stress or instability may turn to imaginative play or the creation of an imaginative world as a way of coping with their experiences and emotions. A child who experiences physical or emotional abuse from a caregiver may turn to imaginative play as a way of creating a sense of safety and control in an otherwise unpredictable and frightening environment. The child may use their imagination to create a world where they feel safe and in control, where they can express their feelings and emotions in a way that feels safe and empowering. Similarly, children who experience neglect, instability, or other forms of stress may use imaginative play as a way of coping with their emotions and developing a sense of mastery over their experiences. By creating an imaginative world, children can explore their feelings and emotions in a safe and non-threatening way and can develop their creativity and problem-solving skills as a means of dealing with real-world challenges.

Imagination and fantasy are often a reflection of a child's early experiences, and fairy tales are a perfect representation of the childhood imaginative world. For centuries, fairy tales have played a vital role in shaping children's understanding of the world by providing a way to explore complex themes, develop moral values, and stimulate imagination and creativity. As J. R.R. Tolkien claims that one of the key aspects of fairy tales is that they often embody the universal themes of good versus evil, love, bravery, and morality that are central to the primitive phantasy world of infancy (1966, p. 37). They feature archetypal characters and plots that tap into the child's innate sense of storytelling and imagination and provide a way for children to explore and make sense of the world around them. Moreover, George McDonald comments on many fairy tales and explores the difficult themes of loss, betrayal, and grief that are the main issues of a child's early years (1984, p. 15). Through the use of magical elements and archetypal characters, fairy tales provide a way for children to process these experiences in a way that feels safe and empowering. By presenting these themes in a fantastical or magical context, fairy tales allow children to explore complex emotions and issues in an accessible and engaging manner.

Melanie Klein's theory is a fertile ground to discuss the impact of childhood imagination and fantasy on writing modern fairy tales. Melanie Klein describes the world of the infant as a phantasy world governed by anxieties and the shift between two phases of development, "paranoid-schizoid position and depressive position", dominates not only the early life but also whole life (1932, p.54). In the paranoid-schizoid position, the earliest phase, the infant relates the world through external part objects, the breast being the first love object. The infant perceives everything as parts rather than whole beings. Through these external part images, the infant tries to ease the anxiety hostile and envious impulses by organizing a split between the good and bad objects in its unconscious phantasy life. The good ones are those that nurture and provide comfort the infant whereas the bad objects are persecutory objects that increase its inner anxiety. Although Klein does not give a clear explanation about whether behaviours of mother or unconscious of the infant is responsible for creating an organization of the objects, the favourable development in the paranoid-schizoid position is that good experiences should predominate over bad ones. The positive aspect of the paranoid-schizoid position is that good experiences should outweigh negative ones. Effective handling of the anxieties faced in the early stages of an infant's development leads to a structured perception of the world. As a result, the infant perceives their ideal object and positive impulses as stronger than their negative object and impulses, leading to greater identification with their ideal object. This, along with the growth and development of their ego, makes them feel more secure and capable of defending themselves and their ideal object. With a strengthened ego and a secure ideal object, the infant experiences fewer paranoid fears and a greater tolerance of their own death instinct.

Klein argued that to cope with these intense feelings, the infant uses what she called the "paranoid-schizoid mechanism" (1988, p. 9). These mechanisms are employed by the individual to maintain their internal sense of security and to manage the anxieties and conflicts associated with separation and individuation. One of these mechanisms is the use of fantasy. The use of fantasy is a psychological process in which the individual creates an imaginary or idealized version of reality as a way of coping with difficult or painful experiences (Segal, 2002, p.12). In other words, the individual uses their imagination to create a different reality that is more desirable or easier to manage than the actual reality. If an individual is feeling lonely or disconnected, they may use their imagination to create an idealized version of a relationship or social situation that is more satisfying than their actual experience. While this can provide temporary relief, it can also lead to feelings of disappointment and frustration when the actual reality does not match the idealized fantasy.

Klein highlights the connection between the creation of an imaginative world as a form of symbol formation and anxiety experienced during childhood (2004, s. 10). This symbolic construction of an inner realm is an unconscious effort to recreate a lost world. The impetus for this recreation stems from the desire to compensate for the loss of objects and past experiences. Artistic expression, therefore, represents a search for symbolic manifestations of the lost ideal world. The act of creation is deeply connected to an unconscious memory of a harmonious internal world and the experience of its demise, known as the "depressive position" (Klein, 1988, s.12). The goal is to recover and reconstruct this lost world through the fantasy of recreation. Achieving this involves balancing negative experiences with positive ones, thereby evoking identification within the creator of the fantasy. Symbolic expression serves as a crucial component of artistic creation, enabling artists to convey their unconscious desires, fantasies, anxieties, and guilt. Consequently, childhood experiences significantly influence an artist's creative identity, shaping their perspective, world view, and approach to their work. By examining the interplay between symbolic expression, childhood experiences, and creative identity, we can gain valuable insights into how artistic creation mirrors the artist's inner world and the experiences that form

their distinct vision. This paper aims to explore the connections between symbolic expression and childhood experiences, and how this relationship contributes to an artist's creative identity. Through a detailed analysis of Edith Nesbit's selected works and incorporating psychological theory insights, this paper will demonstrate the intricate relationship between childhood experiences, symbolic expression, and creative identity present in Edith Nesbit's works.

### **Emotions and imagination: Edith Nesbit's childhood experiences and creative drive**

Edith Nesbit's exceptional skill in articulating herself through modern fairy tales is deeply connected to her endeavour to grapple with and overcome the complex emotions and experiences rooted in her childhood. Renowned children's author Joan Aiken compellingly asserts that Nesbit's greatest strength lies in her unparalleled ability to seamlessly integrate magical and fantastical components with genuine memories of her own personal experiences (1996, p.43). Her creativity comes from her developmental anxieties related to sadness and loss. Hanna Segal, a prominent commentator on Melanie Klein highlights that the creative drive emerges from depressive anxieties that develop during one's growth (2002, p. 207). Segal's ideas on the relationship between creativity and developmental anxieties suggest that Nesbit's childhood experiences may have played a role in shaping her creative drive. To create something meaningful that others can relate to, one needs to use mental processes that are similar to those used during the "depressive position," which is a stage in Klein's theory of development (Klein, 1988, p.11). These mental processes include being able to use symbols to represent emotions, understanding the difference between one's inner and outer reality, and being able to cope with separation and individuality. Writers who go through stages in which they grapple with feelings of sadness, loss, and separation in their childhood reflect these developmental experiences in their creative writing throughout their life. These experiences can be difficult to cope with, but they can also stimulate a child's imagination and creative potential. Nesbit's stories often explore the psychological struggles of her young characters, including their fears, anxieties, and desires. Thus, the childhood experiences of Nesbit, specifically her early anxieties, the loss of her cherished childhood home, her strained relationship with her mother, and being distanced from environments she felt secure in, all significantly contribute to forming her imaginative tendencies as a writer.

Nesbit's formative years were characterized by formidable challenges including terror, the untimely death of her father and the unavailability of her mother during her childhood. To alleviate her anxieties and phobias, she imbued her literary works with characters and scenarios from her personal history. At the tender age of three, Nesbit experienced the loss of her father, John Nesbit, a renowned analytical chemist and a visionary educationist, as confirmed by an obituary in the *Illustrated London News* (April 5, 1862). Edith Nesbit had a few memories of her father not only because of his early death and his busy schedule but also due to some terrifying memories that influence her severely. Nesbit's recollections of her father are tinged with apprehension, particularly when she recalls him playing with her older siblings, prompting her to confide, "the first thing I remember that frightened me was running into my father's dressing-room and finding him playing at wild beasts with her brothers" (Nesbit, 2017, p. 18). Although it was only a game, Nesbit identifies her father with this feeling of horror since the experience intensifies her insecure attachment to her developmental environment.

Furthermore, Nesbit underwent a harrowing incident during her early childhood that left an indelible mark on her life and writing. At the age of eight, she was taken to view the mummies in Bordeaux, where she inadvertently missed the guide's cautionary advice regarding the display of natural mummies, culminating in a traumatizing experience that instilled a profound sense of insecurity and fear that

persisted throughout her life (Fitzsimons, 2019, p.16). Nesbit characterizes her experience with the mummies as the most terrifying event of her childhood, resulting in numerous nights of anguish and horror, as well as years of fear and apprehension. The traumatic image was etched in her memory, and she never forgot it. She further acknowledges that she was unable to navigate any dark room alone, and even as an adult, she was tormented by memories and imagination that were overpowering, limiting her ability to think clearly (Nesbit, 2017, p.19). It appears that Nesbit's early years were characterized by heightened fear, which restricted her behaviour while expanding her imagination.

Nesbit's horrifying childhood experiences do not remain limited with her father and mummies. In her childhood, Nesbit had to endure horrifying experiences that left a lasting impact on her. Her brothers copied their father's behaviour and subjected Nesbit to terrifying situations that they called games. One incident from her childhood involved her being buried so firmly in the garden that she had to be rescued by adults, which must have been an incredibly frightening experience for her (Fitzsimons, 2019, p.27). Additionally, Nesbit was terrified of a two-headed calf that her father had purchased during a trip to the North of England, and her brothers would chase her with it, making her even more scared (Fitzsimons, 2019, p. 23). To make matters worse, her half-sister Saretta together with brothers also used a "hideous mask to pretend to be an old gypsy woman" who was trying to abduct Nesbit (Fitzsimons, 2019, p.28). These childhood fears haunted her for decades and likely had a significant impact on her psychological well-being. It is evident that Nesbit had a deeply traumatic childhood, filled with harrowing experiences that had lasting effects on her. The behaviour of her family members, particularly her brothers and half-sister, seems to have been malicious and cruel, subjecting her to situations that induced terror and panic. The incident of being buried in the garden must have been a horrifying ordeal for Nesbit, which could have potentially led to feelings of helplessness and fear of being trapped. Similarly, being chased with a two-headed calf and the mask-wearing charade to impersonate an old gypsy woman only served to amplify her fears and anxieties. The fact that these experiences were inflicted by her own family members, who should have been her primary source of support and protection, makes the situation even more distressing. The long-lasting psychological impact of such traumatic experiences is evident, as these childhood fears continued to haunt Nesbit for a significant portion of her life.

Nesbit's early childhood was marked by her parents' long-term absences and a lack of parental care, which had a significant impact on her and her siblings. When Nesbit was only two years old, her parents left for Hasting to seek treatment for her father's illness, leaving the children behind with their nurse (Fitzsimons, 2019, p. 29). These frequent and extended absences, based on a Victorian belief in the healing powers of the sea for consumptive patients, had a profound effect on Nesbit's psychological development, as well as that of her sisters and brother. The absence of her father due to his early death compounded the issue, leaving her mother, Sarah, to take on the responsibilities of both parents. However, this was a difficult task as Nesbit's father was a chemist who attracted many students from across the British Isles, and his absence created a significant void in the children's lives (Fitzsimons, 2019, p. 45). Nesbit and her siblings were once again left in the care of a young nurse. Moreover, Nesbit's mother was often absent due to the illness of her sister Mary, leaving Nesbit without the emotional support and attention that she craved and needed for her development. Even when Nesbit attempted to reconcile with her mother, she found her completely preoccupied with her elder ill sister. This lack of emotional connection and parental figures during this critical developmental period had a lasting impact on Nesbit's sense of self, causing her to experience developmental trauma and leaving her craving for emotional and psychological security. It is possible that Nesbit's interest in writing fantasy and escaping into a world of daydreaming stemmed from this period of critical developmental loss. The absence of a

secure and nurturing parental presence at this time robbed Nesbit of the opportunity to develop a strong sense of self and security, leaving a lasting impact on her psychological and emotional development.

Nesbit's sense of loss was amplified by the fact that she also mourned the loss of the nursery house where she had spent much of her childhood playing with cherished toys, including "a large rocking horse, a large doll house, dinner and tea things" (Nesbit, 1913, p.59). As her sister Mary's health deteriorated, Sarah, Nesbit's mother, sold their home in Kennington, packed their belongings away in storage, and relocated to Brighton, where the sea air was believed to be beneficial for Mary's health. The biography of Nesbit offers insight into the home of her childhood that she cherished so deeply, as described in Nesbit's book *Wings and the Child* as a "wonderland for urban children" (Fitzsimons, 2019, p. 144). The Kennington home was adorned with a variety of features, including "a big garden and a meadow and a cottage and a laundry, stables and cowhouse and pigsties, elm trees and vines, tiger lilies and flags in the garden, and chrysanthemums that smelt like earth and hyacinths that smelt like heaven" (Nesbit, 1913, p. 34). Nesbit's longing for this special place persisted throughout her youth, and she searched for a sense of belonging in other places. When she was unable to satisfy her longing to return, she created a similar home in her imagination and incorporated it into her stories.

Nesbit was disappointed with Brighton because of its dissimilar atmosphere and the lack of country-like buildings. She had a deep interest in country architecture and bemoaned the fact that "there was no building at Brighton except on the beach" (Nesbit, 1913, p. 145). Nesbit's disappointment with Brighton is an observation that sheds light on Nesbit's personality and interests. Her passion for country architecture and the lack of such buildings in Brighton left her feeling unfulfilled, indicating that she was someone who valued her physical surroundings and aesthetics. This desire for a certain type of environment could also have influenced her writing, as she frequently incorporated detailed descriptions of landscapes and settings in her stories. Additionally, her disappointment with the atmosphere of Brighton, coupled with her longing for the home of her childhood, highlights the significance of physical surroundings and how they can impact one's sense of belonging and attachment. In her fantasy tales, Nesbit often created imaginative and detailed settings, such as magical gardens, fantastical castles, and enchanted forests. These settings played a crucial role in the narrative and were often imbued with their own personalities and magical powers. Nesbit's attention to the physical surroundings in her fantasy tales allowed readers to become fully immersed in the story and to feel as if they were a part of the magical world she had created. Nesbit's longing for the physical surroundings of her childhood and her use of imaginative settings in her writing demonstrate how important the environment is in shaping an individual's emotions and sense of belonging. This connection between physical surroundings and the emotional experience can be seen in many fantasy tales, where the setting is often used to reflect the emotions of the characters or to create a certain atmosphere that enhances the story's themes. Thus, the relationship between the physical environment and the emotional experience is a significant aspect of both Nesbit's life and her writing.

The challenges Nesbit faced during her time at various boarding schools, including experiences of bullying, separation anxiety, illness, and depression, played a significant role in shaping her life and her fantasy writing. Nesbit describes her first boarding school experience as a weekday boarder at Mrs. Arthur's school, where she was bullied by a little girl who destroyed her toy out of malice (2017, p. 3). She suffered in silence for four days, enduring headaches and tears, without even mentioning the incident to her mother. Nesbit's subsequent enrolment at "a select boarding establishment for young ladies and gentlemen" in faraway Stamford, Lincolnshire brought new struggles (Nesbit, 2017, p. 9). She became preoccupied with her unruly hair and dirty hands, stating that "I brushed it (her hair) for

fruitless hours till my little head was so sore that it hurt me to put my hat on" (Nesbit, 2017, p. 11). The intensity of Nesbit's focus on her hair and cleanliness during this period of her life could be seen as a natural part of growing up, but it also hints at a deeper neurosis, especially when combined with her struggles to keep her hands clean. The challenges she faced with her teachers and herself were a reflection of her trauma from separation from her family and home. These experiences of trauma and anxiety likely played a role in shaping Nesbit's fantasy writing. In her fantasy tales, she often created imaginative worlds that offered a sense of comfort and belonging, where the characters could find a home away from home. The settings in her stories, such as the magical gardens and fantastical castles, provided a sense of safety and security that Nesbit may have been seeking in her own life. Additionally, her stories often focused on themes of family and belonging, which may have been a reflection of her own struggles with separation anxiety and longing for a sense of belonging.

Throughout her life, Edith Nesbit was constantly uprooted and struggled with homesickness, a feeling that became internalized and deeply ingrained in her being. Therefore, it is not accidental that similar themes of longing for home and dealing with displacement echo within her characters, a clear reflection of her personal experiences. For instance, in her book *The Railway Children*, the characters grapple with profound homesickness. A poignant example can be found in a passage where the characters suppress their own feelings of homesickness in an attempt to shield their comrades from their sorrow, as highlighted in the quote, "They felt that they were really a little bit homesick, and that they must be brave, and not let the others know it" (p. 38). Nesbit's own experiences of being separated from her family and constantly moving around also influenced her writing. In *Five Children and It*, the children are taken away from their parents and forced to live in the countryside, mirroring Nesbit's own experiences of being sent away to boarding school. In the novel, she wrote: "London is like a prison for children, especially if their relationships are not rich" (p.43). When Nesbit's mother took her to France in search of treatment for Mary, Nesbit's school attendance became sporadic and unsuccessful. As she did not know any French, she was left with the Lourdes family to learn to speak French in Pau, France, where she recorded feeling alone and helpless: "Then I was left, a little English child without a word of French in the bosom of a French family, and as this came upon me I burst into a flood of tears" (Nesbit, 2017, p. 24). Despite feeling desperate, the Lourdes family may have probably provided a temporary sense of security and belonging, and Nesbit formed a close bond with Marguerite, a young girl her age. However, as was often the case in her life, Nesbit was soon separated from this sense of security and "taken to Biarritz when Mary's health worsened in her absence" (Nesbit, 2017, s. 28). Her family then travelled to England to retrieve her brother Harry from school, and when he recovered, they returned to France to find a summer home. At age ten, Nesbit was sent to "a small English boarding school, presided over by Mrs. Macbean", a kind woman (Nesbit, 2017, p. 29). Despite finding moments of connection and security in the various places she lived, Nesbit could not escape the deep-seated feelings of homesickness that had become a part of her being. Her writing reflects this homesickness, and her ability to capture the universal experience of longing for belonging and connection has made her stories enduring classics.

Edith Nesbit's childhood was marked by a series of disorienting and unstable experiences, including attending various boarding schools and staying with different relatives and friends. Some of these experiences were so difficult that she even ran away from some schools and had to be removed from certain relatives. The constant upheaval and lack of stability resulted in a deep longing for her mother and a persistent desire to engage with the outside world through books and nature. Interestingly, Nesbit's writing for children encourages them to tap into their own imaginations and discover the magic in everyday life. Her work often explores themes of loss, resilience, and the transformative power of

imagination, perhaps influenced by her own experiences. As children's sense of self and their understanding of the world are shaped by their interactions with their caregivers and surroundings, it's likely that Nesbit's early experiences played a role in shaping her identity and creative output. Nesbit's childhood experiences have also contributed to her ability to create relatable and realistic characters in her stories, as well as her talent for portraying the joys and struggles of childhood. Her own experiences of loss and instability may have given her a unique perspective on the challenges that children face and the ways in which they find comfort and resilience. Overall, while Edith Nesbit's childhood was marked by upheaval and instability, her experiences may have contributed to her ability to write timeless stories that resonate with children of all ages. Her work encourages children to explore their own imaginations, to find magic in the world around them, and to recognize the power of their own resilience and imagination in the face of difficult circumstances.

### **Nesbit's literary works: Transforming trauma and emotions through fantasy, imagination, and object relationships**

Edith Nesbit found solace in creativity during times of personal struggle. As a child, she faced many challenges that left her feeling lost and vulnerable. Nesbit's vivid imagination, coupled with her nervous disposition, made her particularly susceptible to phantoms and other fantastical creatures. However, she learned to channel these experiences into her creative endeavours, finding a sense of completeness and strength through her writing. Nesbit's childhood was marked by tragic loss and displacement, which had a profound impact on her emotional wellbeing. From a very young age, she experienced the absence of her mother's nurturing presence, as her mother was unable to tune her. Her father's early death forced her family to leave her beloved home and move from place to place. This deprivation from a secure and comforting environment left her feeling anxious and insecure. Additionally, her older brothers subjected her to bullying and other forms of mistreatment, further contributing to her feelings of weakness and vulnerability. Despite the adversity she faced, Nesbit turned to the world of fantasy and imagination to cope with her pain. Through her creative pursuits, she was able to nurture a secondary world that provided her with a sense of safety and control. This world became a source of strength for her, helping her to feel complete and empowered. As she grew older, she continued to draw on this creative wellspring, channelling her experiences into her writing and other artistic endeavours. As a result, Edith Nesbit's traumatic childhood experiences shaped her into the creative and imaginative writer she became. By turning to the world of fantasy and imagination, she was able to find a sense of completeness and strength that helped her to overcome her feelings of loss and weakness. Nesbit's ability to channel her experiences into her creative work is a testament to the power of art as a means of self-expression and healing.

Edith Nesbit reimagined her traumatic childhood experiences through her stories. Drawing on her vivid imagination, she transformed her memories of loss and displacement into tales of ordinary children from the past, rewriting events to have alternative outcomes and always bringing her stories to a safe and happy ending. Her works belong to the full-length fantasy genre, which allows her to explore her creative impulses fully. Drawing on Kleinian theory, it can be argued that Edith Nesbit's artistic creativity was propelled by the repetitive impulses of the depressive position. Her tales feature motifs of splitting between good and evil, separation and incorporation, giants, fundamental conflicts, and resolution. Through her writing, Nesbit's ego is rehearsing the persecutory anxiety of the paranoid-schizoid position. She must integrate and work through her earlier mental states, including the perception of chaos and persecution and the ideal state of being merged with her mother. Nesbit deeply wishes to return to a happier mind state and conditions that existed before her depressive phase began.

In essence, Nesbit's creation of a new world through her stories is an unconscious recreation of a lost world. The characters in her stories represent parts of her own psyche, as she works to integrate her past traumas and anxieties. By bringing her stories to a happy ending, Nesbit is working towards a resolution of her anxieties and a sense of wholeness. Nesbit's works show how the imaginative process can provide a way to work through past traumas and create new worlds of possibility.

Unravelling the profound connection between Edith Nesbit and her imaginative works, particularly as a unique manifestation of object relations theory, provides a compelling lens into her psychological landscape. Using this theory, Nesbit skilfully redefines her connection with her past experiences, as seen in the classification of her stories into three separate categories. Her first category of stories is enriched with magical creatures and supernatural events, masterfully used to captivate her readers with an air of mystery and wonder. Among her most famous in this genre, *The Enchanted Castle* shines. It's a tale of three children who, through a magical ring, journey into otherworldly realms. Nesbit's use of these fantastical elements is a testament to her imaginative retelling of early experiences. The second category spotlights the intricate dynamics within family relationships and the bonds among siblings. Here, Nesbit effectively weaves invaluable life lessons about familial solidarity and cooperation. *The Railway Children*, a standout example, chronicles an adventurous family's relocation to the countryside, where they encounter an array of interesting characters and challenges, each presenting its own vital life lesson. The final category sees Nesbit's young protagonists embark on exhilarating adventures, exploring unfamiliar territories. Notable examples include *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *The Wouldbegoods*, which exhibit children's exploration and escapades. Nesbit's all works offer a window into her attempts at redefining her relationship with the tangible world and early life experiences. She infuses her narratives with a resounding sense of childhood wonder and curiosity, ingeniously weaving her experiences into her works. Through this process, Nesbit not only reconnects with her early experiences, but also fills her storytelling with profound purpose and meaning. It is this remarkable talent and emotional depth that make her stories enduring classics.

In Edith Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle*, magic holds a crucial role as a driver of the narrative, transforming everyday elements into something extraordinary and artfully merging the real with the fantastical. Nesbit, in a passage from *The Enchanted Castle*, details the role of magic as a dynamic force within the story and frees the narrative from the boundaries of realistic storytelling. This in turn, paves the way for limitless opportunities in advancing the storyline, developing characters, and delving into various themes:

There is a curtain, thin as gossamer, clear as glass, strong as iron, that hangs forever between the world of magic and the world that seems to be real. And when once people have found one of the little weak spots in the curtain which are marked by magic rings, and amulets, and the like, almost anything may happen. (p. 170)

The lines define the magics as a catalyst. Magic provides an endless realm of possibilities, enabling the children to explore new dimensions of their reality and themselves. The enchanted castle serves as a playground for adventures, where the rules of the physical world are continually subverted, and the children are thrust into unpredictable, whimsical, and often challenging situations. Magic, in this context, is not merely a source of thrill and mystery, but it also fosters personal growth and exploration. The children must navigate the complex implications of their actions within the magical realm, learning valuable lessons about responsibility, courage, empathy, and the power of imagination along the way. In this regard, Nesbit's magic is a transformative force, both in terms of plot and character development,

expanding the narrative into a multi-layered exploration of the human condition through the lens of childhood wonder and discovery.

Edith Nesbit's use of themes of magic and fantasy in her *The Enchanted Castle*, may be interpreted as reflecting her "paranoid-schizoid phase" (Klein, 1988, s. 13). In the paranoid-schizoid position, which typically occurs in infancy, the child experiences the world in a fragmented and chaotic manner and may use primitive defence mechanisms, such as splitting and projective identification, to cope with intense feelings of fear and aggression. In *The Enchanted Castle*, Nesbit creates an atmosphere characterized by anxiety and terror as the three children, Gerald, Cathy, and Jimmy, discover an enchanted castle inhabited by a cursed princess and statues that come to life at night. In *The Enchanted Castle*, Edith Nesbit describes stone creatures come alive in a way that it creates a secondary world in the mind of her child readers:

There was a crunching of the little stones in the gravel of the drive. Something enormously long and darkly grey came crawling towards him, slowly, heavily. The moon came out just in time to show its shape. It was one of those great lizards that you see at the Crystal Palace, made in stone, of the same awful size which they were millions of years ago when they were masters of the world, before Man was. (p. 233)

Nesbit describes stone creatures coming to life to create a powerful anxiety-inducing atmosphere. The creatures are depicted as enormous and daunting, creating a palpable sense of fear that parallels the fearful perception of the world characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid phase. The magical, threatening world is perceived as persecutory, and the princess becomes the focus of attack and hostile projections. In essence, Nesbit's secondary world within the minds of her child readers, filled with intrigue and fear, just as a child in the paranoid-schizoid phase might perceive the real world. This not only demonstrates Nesbit's adept use of psychological theory to shape her narrative but also reveals a deeper layer of her narrative craft that resonates with her reader's own anxieties and fears.

The story may represent Nesbit's own sense of split as she experienced exile from her mother's warm holding at an early age, and later from her nursery home in Kensington, leading to a life in Brighton. In her internal world, she may have felt split between a rich and wondrous ideal world, represented by the castle, and a depleted part of herself, represented by the house in Brighton, devoid of feeling and sensation. While the magical elements of *The Enchanted Castle* provide excitement and adventure for the children, their wishes do not always turn out as expected, causing fear and confusion. When the children wish for a giant to take them away from the castle, they are frightened by the giant's appearance and must use their wits to escape. The story highlights the unpredictable and sometimes dangerous effects of magic and the importance of using good judgement and working together to navigate the challenges presented by the world. Overall, the themes in Nesbit's stories reflect her own psychological growth and development, as well as her experiences of exile, split, and the allure of the imagination.

Nesbit's childhood was marked by significant challenges. These early experiences might have contributed to a sense of insecure attachment, as Nesbit experienced the loss of a primary caregiver and faced an uncertain future. In The Psammead Trilogy, the children encounter a magical creature capable of granting wishes, which often leads to unintended consequences. Edith Nesbit's Psammead Trilogy comprises three enchanting books: *Five Children and It* (1902), *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904), and *The Story of the Amulet* (1906). These works follow the narrative of children who, in their extraordinary encounters with magical creatures and objects, embark on a series of captivating adventures. The adventures the children embark upon after their encounter with the wish granting Psammead refer to Nesbit early life experiences. This dynamic can be seen as a representation of the paranoid-schizoid

position, where children split their experiences into good and bad as a defence mechanism. The magical creature, central to the first book *Five Children and It*, is the Psammead, also fondly referred to as the "sand-fairy." This peculiar creature possesses the power to grant wishes, a premise that Nesbit ingeniously exploits to take her readers on a journey full of whimsy, moral lessons, and endless imagination. The children's wishes often lead to chaotic, unpredictable outcomes, which reflect the dialectic between the good and bad aspects of 'paranoid-schizoid' position. The world becomes a place full of disparate, frightening experiences, filled with intense feelings of fear and anxiety as well as intense feelings of happiness and excitement. This could be seen as a manifestation of the projection of their internal emotional states onto their external world. In the subsequent books, *The Phoenix and the Carpet* and *The Story of the Amulet*, the children seem to transition towards Klein's depressive position. The children begin to acknowledge the consequences of their wishes and actions, understanding that the world is not merely split into good and bad. They develop a sense of guilt and empathy and start attempting to repair the problems caused by their previous actions or wishes. In *The Phoenix and the Carpet*, the magical objects central to the narrative are a Phoenix and a flying carpet. The Phoenix is a mythical bird that has been reborn from the ashes. It possesses the power of immortality and is able to grant a single wish to the children. The carpet is a mystical object with the ability to transport the children anywhere they desire, leading them to a series of adventures. The magic carpet in *The Phoenix and the Carpet* can serve as a symbol of the transitional journey between the "paranoid-schizoid position" and the "depressive position" in Melanie Klein's theories. As the children ride the carpet to various locations and have numerous adventures, they face the consequences of their actions and decisions, learning important life lessons. In this journey, the children start to appreciate the whole object, understanding that good and bad are not separated but co-exist. They also start to feel a sense of guilt and responsibility for their actions, attempting to repair any harm done, which is a significant aspect of the depressive position. The magic carpet can be viewed as a metaphorical representation of Nesbit's own life experiences. It might symbolize her desire for escape from the hardships she experienced in her childhood, including the loss of her father and her subsequent displacement from familiar surroundings. Through the children's adventures on the magic carpet, Nesbit could be exploring her own longing for a more stable and secure reality, reflecting on her own journey of navigating through a world fraught with change and uncertainty.

In *The Story of the Amulet*, the magical object is an ancient Egyptian amulet. The children initially possess only half of it, which allows them to be transported back to different periods in history. The other half of the amulet has the power to fulfil their heart's desire. The narrative revolves around their quest to find the other half of the amulet, hoping it would grant their wish of their parents' return home. The magical amulet can be seen as an instrument that propels the children towards the "depressive position" of Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theories. The children's quest to find the missing half of the amulet involves them in various adventures, during which they confront the consequences of their actions and learn to empathize with others' experiences. As they navigate through these challenges, they move from viewing the world in fragmented, good-or-bad terms towards an understanding of its complexities. They develop a sense of guilt for any harm they've caused and a desire to make amends. This mirrors the transition into the depressive position, where there is an increased awareness of the effects of one's actions and a drive to repair any damage caused. Regarding Edith Nesbit's biographical memories, the amulet could symbolize her own longing for wholeness and stability. The missing half of the amulet can represent the losses and separations she experienced in her childhood, such as the loss of her father and her cherished home. The children's quest to make the amulet whole again could be seen as a reflection of Nesbit's own desire to mend the broken parts of her life and find a sense of safety and security.

The Psammead Trilogy embodies both benevolence and malevolence, reflecting the psychological process of projection often observed in this developmental stage. As the children face the consequences of their wishes and learn valuable lessons about responsibility, empathy, and understanding the complexities of their desires, they symbolically move from the paranoid-schizoid position to the more mature depressive position, integrating and accepting both the good and bad aspects of their experiences. Although these connections may not have been the author's original intention, such analysis offers a deeper understanding of the themes and emotional resonance of Nesbit's work, particularly in relation to children's psychological development. Moreover, The Psammead Trilogy is characterized by children encountering magical entities and situations that challenge their perceptions of reality. These adventures serve as powerful metaphors for the emotional tumult often linked to insecure attachment. As the children grapple with the intricacies of their desires and the ensuing consequences, they imbibe significant lessons about responsibility, empathy, and the criticality of forging bonds with others. This learning and growth could well be a reflection of Nesbit's personal voyage towards surmounting the obstacles of her early life to find security and stability in her relationships and career. Insecure attachment often manifests in feelings of apprehension, fear of abandonment, and difficulties in cultivating stable relationships. Nesbit's narratives, especially those with a fantasy and magical element, frequently feature characters who are distanced from their families or face formidable challenges. These plot devices draw a direct line to Nesbit's own turbulent childhood, defined by financial hardships, numerous relocations, and the devastating loss of her father and sister. Such personal experiences deeply influenced Nesbit's creative identity and the themes she incorporated in her writings. She harnessed her own experiences of loss and uncertainty to weave narratives that underscored the significance of familial ties and interpersonal relationships. Absent or missing parents are a recurring motif in her stories, mirroring the trauma Nesbit herself and her characters underwent.

Another narrative that reflects Nesbit's own childhood experiences and the profound impact they had on her storytelling is *The Railway Children*. The novel tells the story of a family who lives in a comfortable home in London, including three children: Roberta (Bobbie), Peter, and Phyllis. Their lives take an unexpected turn when their father, who works for the Foreign Office, is falsely accused of spying and sent to prison. Their mother, left to raise the children alone, moves the family to a smaller house near a railway in Yorkshire to save money. The children adapt to their new circumstances, turning the nearby railway into a source of adventure. Throughout the story, they encounter and befriend a number of people who come in and out of their lives because of the railway. This includes an old gentleman who rides the 9:15 train they wave at every morning, who turns out to be a very influential individual. The old gentleman helps them in a variety of ways, including aiding a Russian writer, Mr. Szczepansky, to find his family and supporting their mother who is struggling to make ends meet by buying her stories for publication. In the book's dramatic peak, the old gentleman assists in exonerating their father. As their father is at last freed from prison and makes his way back home, the family experiences a jubilant reunion at the railway station. Bobbie delivers the most well-known line of the novel in her excitement, "Oh! my Daddy, my Daddy!" (p. 180).

Nesbit's personal life was marked by several instances of loss and grief; she lost her father when she was young and her husband had relationships with other women, one of whom bore him a child whom Nesbit raised as her own. In *The Railway Children*, the father is unjustly accused and imprisoned, causing him to be absent from his children's lives. This significant loss and the children's subsequent adjustments and reunions may mirror Nesbit's own experiences of loss and adaptation. Nesbit's characters are forced to rely on each other and work together to solve problems after they are separated from their father. This theme of collaboration and the importance of family may have reflected Nesbit's own desire for stability

and security in the face of loss and upheaval. Edith Nesbit's stories can be seen as a form of reparative phantasy, as they seek to resolve the anxieties and emotional turmoil she experienced during her childhood. Nesbit's acute anxiety, particularly during the often-absent periods of her parents, is reflected in her stories through repeated experiences of loss and recovery. In many of her stories, the theme of missing or absent parents is explored, with the characters often working to recover or reunite with their loved ones. This focus on reunification can be seen as a way for Nesbit to address her own feelings of loss and separation from her parents, and to provide a sense of closure and resolution to these experiences. Additionally, Nesbit's boarding school years were particularly challenging, as her mother was often absent for long periods of time. These absences were felt as a form of death by Nesbit, adding to her already intense anxiety. However, through her stories, Nesbit was able to create a world where reunification and recovery were possible, offering a form of comfort and reassurance. Nesbit's stories can be seen as a way for her to process and heal from the emotional challenges she faced during her childhood, providing a sense of hope and resolution in the face of loss and anxiety.

Kleinian theory places great emphasis on the child's early experience of the mother. The mother in *The Railway Children* is depicted as a nurturing figure who holds the family together despite challenging circumstances. This could reflect Nesbit's own yearning for a protective figure, given that her mother was often absent due to work obligations and the illness of her sister following the death of her father. To define the importance of a mother figure as a source of comfort and solace, particularly during times of distress. Nesbit writes in *The Railway Children*:

It seems so easy and natural to run to Mother when one is in trouble. Bobbie understood a little how people do not leave off running to their mothers when they are in trouble even when they are grown up, and she thought she knew a little what it must be to be sad, and have no mother to run to any more. (p. 28)

This passage underscores that no matter how old one gets, the impulse to turn to one's mother in times of hardship or distress remains strong. Drawing a parallel with Nesbit's own life, her mother was compelled to assume the responsibilities of the household and become the primary earner following the demise of Nesbit's father, a situation mirroring that of the mother in "The Railway Children". Despite formidable hardships, the mother in the novel remains a constant source of comfort and stability for her children. This nurturing presence contrasts sharply with Nesbit's own childhood experiences, marked by the absence of her mother. Bobbie's reflections in the novel, particularly about the soothing and reassuring role a mother plays during tough times, may mirror Nesbit's personal yearning for maternal comfort during her formative years. Frequent physical absences of her mother could have intensified this desire, highlighting the significance and impact of a mother's presence during challenging periods. Further, Bobbie's empathy and understanding towards those who are "sad and have no mother to run to anymore" (p. 28) may resonate with Nesbit's personal sentiments and experiences. It showcases a profound understanding of the deep sense of loss and longing that can arise in the absence of a comforting maternal figure. Consequently, even though Nesbit's mother was frequently absent due to her professional commitments, the intrinsic need for maternal comfort and an empathetic comprehension of the pain associated with its absence are clearly visible in Nesbit's writings. These elements likely echo her own experiences and emotional landscape.

Edith Nesbit's adventurous spirit was reflected in both her personal life and her writing. Nesbit's childhood experiences, including running away to Germany as a child and walking barefoot from Whitstable to Canterbury, were a testament to her sense of adventure and love for exploration. Many of the adventures in Nesbit's stories, such as *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *The Wouldbegoods*

were inspired by a perfect summer that Nesbit spent with her family in La Haye in France. Both novels, written by Edith Nesbit, are part of the Bastable Children series and feature the six Bastable siblings - Dora, Oswald, Dicky, Alice, Noel, and Horace Octavius. These books follow the siblings' various adventures and their interactions with a cast of other characters. *The Treasure Seekers* is the first book in the series, and *The Wouldbegoods* is the direct sequel. According to story, after a long period of separation, the family was reunited in a rustic farmhouse in Brittany, where they enjoyed the freedom and stability they craved. Nesbit's own experiences at La Haye were reflected in her stories, particularly in the adventures of the Bastable children of *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*. *The Treasure Seekers* is an important novel in the realm of children's literature due to its child-perspective narration, revolves around the spirited Bastable children. Oswald Bastable, the eldest and the book's primary narrator, stands at the forefront of their adventurous endeavours. He is accompanied by his siblings including Dora Bastable, the oldest and responsible daughter among the family. The siblings' distinct personalities add a charming dynamic to the story, leaving readers engrossed in their journey. Like Nesbit and her brothers in La Haye, the characters in *The Treasure Seekers* played shipwrecked mariners on the roof of the hen house and followed a stream to its source. Alice Bastable describes how they follow a stream to its source, just as Edith and her brothers Alfred and Harry had:

I cannot tell you about all the windings of the stream; it went through fields and woods and meadows, and at last the banks got steeper and higher, and the trees overhead darkly arched their mysterious branches, and we felt like the princes in a fairy tale who go out to seek their fortunes. (p. 51)

Through these shared experiences, Nesbit was able to capture the joy and wonder of childhood exploration and the importance of family. For Nesbit, the weeks spent at La Haye were a key period of stability and happiness in an otherwise turbulent childhood. "The happy memories of that golden time crowd thickly upon me," she wrote in her *My School Days* (53). These experiences helped to shape her adventurous spirit and inspire her writing, which continues to captivate readers of all ages today.

It is possible to interpret Edith Nesbit's adventure stories as a form of reparation for the continual moving and instability she experienced in her life, as described by Klein's theory. According to Klein's reparation theory, individuals have an innate need to repair and make up for losses they have experienced. These losses can be related to both internal and external objects, such as loved ones, parts of the self, or a sense of stability and security. Reparation involves the process of acknowledging and mourning these losses, and seeking to compensate for them through creative, constructive, or altruistic activities. In *The Treasure Seekers* and *The Wouldbegoods*, the concept of recuperation becomes increasingly apparent as a core theme. Recuperation, or the process of regaining health, control or an acceptable condition, manifests in the stories as a recurring motif that parallels Nesbit's own life experiences. In *The Treasure Seekers*, the Bastable children attempt to recuperate their family's lost fortune and, symbolically, the stability and security they once enjoyed. Oswald stresses their efforts to mend their condition by suggesting, "We need to hunt for treasure; that's the usual method we use when trying to sort out our family's financial issues" (p. 129). In the novel, the siblings come up with various schemes to restore their family's lost wealth. Each of these instances is an attempt at recuperation. The children's adventures in seeking treasure, while ostensibly about restoring their family's financial standing, reflect their yearning to regain a sense of normalcy and the comforts of their previous life. Similarly, in *The Wouldbegoods*, the children embark on a quest for redemption to counterbalance their previous misdemeanours, a journey that serves as their own form of moral and behavioural recuperation. After the misadventures of the previous book, the children decide to form a society called "Wouldbegoods", intending to do good deeds to improve their reputation. In the story, Alice Bastable shares, "we deeply reflected on our wrongdoings, determined to rectify ourselves and become better. We

brought Daisy into our discussions, and she contributed an idea. Consequently, we are intent on creating a society aimed at fostering our personal growth and goodness" (p. 35). This again is an example of recuperation. They aim to reform their reputation, thereby restoring the faith of their elders and peers in their capacity for goodness. Both these narratives demonstrate how the act of recuperation transcends the physical and financial, seeping into the emotional and moral realms. This mirrors Nesbit's own life experiences, where she often found herself in situations requiring her to regain or restore something she had lost. Her exploration of these themes in her writing suggests a personal understanding of the trials, tribulations, and triumphs that can come with the process of recuperation.

Edith Nesbit childhood was marked by significant losses and instability, including the death of her father, the illness of her sister, and frequent moves. These experiences likely left her with a sense of emotional insecurity and a need for stability and continuity in her life. Through her writing, Nesbit was able to create a world where reunification and recovery were possible. The adventures and explorations depicted in her stories may have represented a form of compensation for the lack of stability she experienced in her own life. By crafting stories that emphasized the importance of family, friendship, and collaboration, Nesbit was able to create a sense of continuity and order that may have been lacking in her own experiences. Moreover, through her writing, Nesbit was also able to acknowledge and mourn her losses, as seen in the theme of missing or absent parents that recurs throughout her stories. This process of mourning and reparation can be seen as a way for Nesbit to work through her own emotional struggles and find a sense of meaning and purpose in her life.

## Conclusion

Edith Nesbit, a celebrated author, and poet, holds a prominent position in the realm of children's literature. Her timeless works, encompassing novels, poetry, and short stories, captivate readers across generations with their engaging narratives and relatable themes. Nesbit's writing is distinguished by her vivid imagination, incorporation of fantastical elements, and exploration of themes surrounding family, adventure, and friendship in children's literature.

Despite the enchanting nature of her work, Nesbit's creative identity was moulded by her own harrowing childhood experiences, which left an indelible mark on her emotional wellbeing. These traumatic events not only shaped Nesbit as a person, but also influenced her approach to writing, imbuing her stories with depth and an underlying understanding of the emotional complexities faced by children. As a result, her unique perspective on childhood adversity adds a layer of authenticity and resonance to her contributions to children's literature.

As a child, Nesbit faced many challenges that left her feeling lost and vulnerable. Her childhood was marked by tragic loss and displacement, including the death of her father and the illness of her sister. Moreover, Nesbit's mother was unable to establish a secure attachment with her, leading to a sense of deprivation and insecurity in her life. Additionally, her older brothers subjected her to bullying and other forms of mistreatment, further contributing to her feelings of weakness and vulnerability. Despite the adversity she faced, Nesbit turned to the world of fantasy and imagination to cope with her pain. Through her creative pursuits, she was able to nurture a secondary world that provided her with a sense of safety and control. This world became a source of strength for her, helping her to feel complete and empowered.

Nesbit's ability to channel her experiences into her creative work is a testament to the power of art as a means of self-expression and healing. Her writing can be seen as a form of reparative phantasy, seeking to resolve the anxieties and emotional turmoil she experienced during her childhood. Nesbit's acute anxiety, particularly during the often-absent periods of her parents, is reflected in her stories through repeated experiences of loss and recovery. In many of her stories, the theme of missing or absent parents is explored, with the characters often working to recover or reunite with their loved ones. This focus on reunification can be seen as a way for Nesbit to address her own feelings of loss and separation from her parents, and to provide a sense of closure and resolution to these experiences.

Moreover, Nesbit's stories demonstrate the importance of family, friendship, and collaboration. Her characters often work together to solve problems, highlighting the value of cooperation and teamwork. Nesbit's adventurous spirit, love for exploration, and need for stability and continuity are reflected in her stories, offering readers a sense of joy, wonder, and hope. Through her writing, Nesbit was able to create a world where reunification and recovery were possible, providing a form of comfort and reassurance.

Nesbit's use of themes of magic and fantasy in her stories, such as in *The Enchanted Castle*, may be interpreted as reflecting her paranoid-schizoid phase. In the paranoid-schizoid position, which typically occurs in infancy, the child experiences the world in a fragmented and chaotic manner and may use primitive defence mechanisms, such as splitting and projective identification, to cope with intense feelings of fear and aggression. In *The Enchanted Castle*, Nesbit creates an atmosphere characterized by anxiety and terror as the three children, Gerald, Cathy, and Jimmy, discover an enchanted castle inhabited by a cursed princess and statues that come to life at night. The magical, threatening world is perceived as persecutory, and the princess becomes the focus of attack and hostile projections. The story may represent Nesbit's own sense of split as she experienced exile from her mother's warm holding at an early age, and later from her nursery home in Kensington, leading to a life in Brighton. In her internal world, she may have felt split between a rich and wondrous ideal world, represented by the castle, and a depleted part of herself, represented by the house in Brighton, devoid of feeling and sensation.

In her writing, Nesbit emphasizes the importance of imagination, curiosity, and adventure, encouraging her young readers to explore the world around them and use their creativity to solve problems. Her stories often feature child protagonists who are resourceful, independent, and curious, reflecting Nesbit's own adventurous spirit and desire to empower young readers. However, her stories also deal with more complex themes, such as loss, separation, and the struggle to find one's place in the world. Through her characters' experiences, Nesbit offers young readers a way to explore and process their own emotions and challenges, fostering empathy, resilience, and a sense of possibility.

Despite the challenges she faced in her personal life, Nesbit's writing legacy continues to inspire generations of readers and writers. Her imaginative and adventurous stories, infused with themes of empathy, resilience, and social justice, offer a powerful model for creative expression and personal growth. As Nesbit herself once wrote, "There is no happiness like that of being loved by your fellow creatures and feeling that your presence is an addition to their comfort" (Nesbit, 1913, s. 23). In her own life and writing, Nesbit embodied this spirit of compassion, creativity, and connection, leaving a lasting legacy of literary and personal inspiration.

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