

Henrietta Marshall's *Our Island Story* (1905) and the Edwardian Children's History Book

Our Island Story was published in 1905 by the Edinburgh firm of T.C. and E.C. Jack, who published a considerable list of children's illustrated books in the Edwardian period; it included 30 illustrations by A.S. Forrest. The embossed cover announced the two themes which I wish to consider in this paper: Marshall's narrativity and her national story. The cover showed an unidentified knight on the back of a rampant horse – an almost heraldic figure – situated against a landscape with a castle to the right, and a seascape and ships to the left. The colour scheme was predominantly red, white, and blue, with a limited use of maroon and yellow. Accordingly, the book presented itself as both a story-book (a tale of knights and castles is promised) and also as a nationalist narrative – the seascape and the colour scheme clearly connote the 'island story' within.

The impact of the combination of text and image in *Our Island Story* on the readership is, unusually, traceable. The current curriculum-related interest in the work has led to readers recording their reading experience as children. One of the most interesting of these accounts is that of the veteran popular historian, Antonia Fraser. For *The Telegraph* of 23 June 2005, Fraser recorded her response to *Our Island Story*. The edition to which she refers appears to have contained the Forrest plates, although the cover design – which she describes as featuring 'the royal arms picked out in red' across a dark blue background – is not that of the Edwardian edition. Nevertheless, it did make the same visual statement about national identity, utilising two of the three colours of the national flag. Fraser asserts that the book was 'a direct inspiration for me in my career as an historian', and then records her experience of it in detail, placing considerable emphasis on the role of the illustrations in shaping her response. In fact, she tells us that she used one of the illustrations from the book – that of Boadicea – in her own work, *Warrior Queens*, and that one of her children – Flora – was named after a key figure in the book, Flora MacDonald. Interestingly, the parting of Flora and Bonnie Prince Charlie was the subject of one of the illustrations. Fraser places considerable emphasis on the narrativity of text and image, recalling the 'account of the Princes in the Tower' as a particularly haunting passage: not only did it have 'a wonderful illustration', but the murder of the princes was narrated with

‘terrific imagination’. Fraser argues persuasively, despite her awareness of its ‘eyebrow raisers’ and the advances of twentieth-century historiography, that ‘This book sticks out now because it seems to say ‘I will tell you stories’, an idea with which I profoundly agree’.¹

Telling Stories: Re-discovering a Dying Culture

In my 2000 monograph, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image*, I considered the approaches and rhetorics of early to mid-Victorian history textbook - and the challenge presented to it by the late-nineteenth-century development of more positivist and scientific forms of historical representation. I argued that the earlier version of the textbook was often written by women authors, and placed an emphasis on the dramatic telling of ‘true stories’ and historical anecdotes, often within a fictional familial framework, with the author posing as a mother or aunt figure, a sort of historical Mother Goose; these works offered moral instruction in domestic and social virtues, and were often accompanied with copious illustrations, fictional reconstructions of key historical episodes. Later in the century, I suggested, textbooks became a much more serious affair, the vehicle for the conveyance of ‘facts, not judgements’, in a text often written by a ‘professional’ male – historian or school-teacher – for the purpose of training school pupils in citizenship and enabling them to pass examinations. Their illustrations became fewer and were often reproductions of artefacts, sources, and locations, rather than reconstructions. The narrative, mythical and story-telling element of historical representation was, I argued, increasingly relegated to history books for very young children, and historical tales and novels for both adults and children.²

Marshall’s *Our Island Story* in many ways reflects this divergence within textual and visual historical representations for children, presenting a sort of Edwardian coda to my thesis. In the preface to the book – ‘How this book came to be written’ - Marshall situates her own publication revealingly: like classic early nineteenth-century textbook writers such as Mrs Markham (Elizabeth Penrose) and Lady Callcott, she creates a domestic framework. In a household somewhere in Australia, the somewhat curiously named Spen and Veda – you suspect an anagram – ask their father about the ‘old country’, and he responds with ‘Long, long ago ..’, before

deciding that so lengthy a tale requires someone else to write it up. Marshall – apparently the candidate for this job – addresses her audience:

I must tell you, though, that this is not a history lesson, but a story-book. There are many facts in school histories, that seem to children to belong to lessons only. Some of these you will not find here. But you will find some stories that are not to be found in your school books, - stories which wide people say are only fairy tales and not history. But it seems to me that they are part of Our Island Story, and ought not to be forgotten, any more than those stories about which there is no doubt.³

This affection for the traditional anecdotes of English history, coupled with a clear sense that they are inauthentic and therefore unacceptable in more rigidly scholastic contexts, is one shared by later Victorian women textbook writers who often clung to historical legends while signalling their inauthenticity with opening phrases such as ‘It seems’ and ‘as the stories say’. In the 1870s, the home-educated Mollie Hughes recorded both her introduction to history through an old-style storybook version, and the proliferation of qualifications to the legendary tradition apparent by the later nineteenth century. She recalled that:

My English history was derived from a little book in small print which dealt with the characters of the kings at some length. I learnt how one was ruthless alike to friend and foe and another was so weak that the sceptre fell from his nerveless grasp. I seemed to see it falling. The book had no doubts or evidence, but gave all the proper anecdotes about the cakes, the peaches and the new ale, never smiling again, the turbulent priest and the lighted candle ... They were much more glowing than if they had been introduced by the chilling words ‘it is said that’.⁴

This passage offers an insight into the experience of a reader of the traditional historical text, emphasizing its dramatic and visual quality and the focus on character and colourful detail which allowed it to make a long term impression on its audience. Through the tales told, the past seems to come alive: ‘I seemed to see it falling’, remarks the young reader of the weak king’s sceptre. Marshall’s *Our Island Story* clearly set out to re-access this vivid culture of oral, dramatic, legendary and anecdotal tradition, and this is apparent in both the text and the images of the book. Marshall arranges the chapters around evocative episodes which feature striking characters and dramatic events, and she frequently deploys poetic quotations to narrate, animate, and enhance her tales. Many derive, not surprisingly, from Shakespeare, whose historical plays had formed the major basis for much of the English historical tradition. Meanwhile, Forrest provides illustrations which – like

those presented in early Victorian textbooks – are almost always reconstructive and metaphorical in their relationship to the text: that is, they offer a visual parallel version of the historical story which Marshall relates, rather than presenting, for instance, an artefact or building of the period. These images often draw iconographically on a vigorous Victorian and even pre-Victorian tradition of historical genre painting. Both author and illustrator attempt to involve the child reader as much as possible in the story, highlighting the role of children in past events and thus providing an empathetic link through self-identification with the child characters for the reader.

A good example of Marshall's emphasis on the legendary elements of British history, for instance, can be seen in her inclusion of Arthurian legends, which she situates between her account of the arrival of the Saxons and her coverage of the reign of Alfred the Great. Marshall opens her coverage of the period with details of the attempts of the Romano-British leader, Aurelius Ambrosius, to repel the Saxon settlers, for which there is some historical evidence in early chronicles, but she swiftly moves to describe his decision to place a monument to the Romano-British dead on the field of battle, and the offer of the magician Merlin to move the Giants' Dance from Ireland. Aurelius's response is a sceptical one:

...he burst out laughing. "How is it possible," he asked, "to remove such big stones from a far-off country? Have we not enough stones in Britain with which to build a monument?" and he laughed again.

"Do not laugh," said Merlin gravely. "They are wonderful stones. Every one of them will cure some kind of illness. They are fairy stones."⁵

Clearly aware that this entirely fanciful tale will probably provoke some criticism – fairy stories, as well as fairy stones, are apparent here – Marshall offers an editorial vindication.

Most people say this is a fairy tale, and ought not to be put in a history book. They say that the stones on Stonehenge were there long before Merlin lived, long before Hengist and his Saxons, or Cæsar and his Romans, even long before Brutus of Troy, came. They say that probably no one will ever find out how these stones came to be there, or why they were placed as they are. I dare say they are right, but fairy tales are very interesting, and this fairy

tale (if it is one) is to be found in some of the first histories of Britain that were ever written. So certainly at one time people must have believed it to be true.⁶

She continues in this Arthurian vein in the following two chapters, which describe 'The Coming of Arthur' and 'The Founding of the Round Table', each interspersed with a quotation from (respectively) Tennyson's 'The Coming of Arthur' in *The Idylls of the King*, and the early-thirteenth-century legendary history of Britain, *Brut*, by the priest Layamon.⁷ The emphasis on the legendary is further enhanced by the accompanying illustration to the chapter on 'The Coming of Arthur', which shows the young king, escorted by Merlin, drawing the sword Excalibur from the stone.

Another classical example of Marshall's narrativity – her ability to bring the past alive through a vivid tale replete with characters and incident - is her account of one of the most traditional anecdotes of English historical tradition: the death of Henry I's only son in the *White Ship*. What might, in a contemporary textbook, be briefly described to explain the succession crisis which followed Henry I's death becomes an engrossing human drama. It is worth quoting at some length, as it illustrates perfectly her ability to set the scene, dramatise events, and encourage empathy with the characters of her tale. After explaining how the 'gay ship', heavily laden with 'fine ladies and gay gentlemen' sets out later than expected from the French coast, she describes the scene and then the catastrophe:

It was a clear and frosty winter's evening. The red sun had sunk and a silver moon shone brightly. All was merriment and laughter when, suddenly, there was an awful crash. The ship seemed to shiver from end to end and then stand still. The next minute it began to sink. It had struck upon a rock.

One fearful wail of agony rose from the hearts of three hundred people, breaking the stillness of the night. Far away over the sea Henry heard that cry. "What is it?" he asked, straining anxious eyes through the darkness.

"Only some night bird, sire," replied the captain.

"Methought it was some soul in distress," said Henry, still looking back over the sea, anxious he knew not why.

On the *White Ship*, all was terrible confusion. Without losing a moment FitzStephen [the captain] thrust the prince into the only small boat, and bade the sailors row off. He at least must be saved, though all the rest should perish.

The prince, hardly knowing what had happened, allowed the sailors to row away from the sinking vessel. But suddenly a voice called to him, "Ah, William, William, do you leave me to perish?"

It was the voice of his sister Marie.

William was careless and selfish, but he loved his sister. He could not leave her. "Go back," he said to the sailors, "go back, we must take my sister too."

"We dare not, sire," replied the boatmen. "We dare not, we must go on."

"You dare not," cried the prince, "am I not the son of the King of England? Obey me."

The prince spoke so sternly that the men turned the boat and went back to the sinking ship.

As the boat drew near, the Princess Marie, with a cry of joy, leaped into her brother's arm. But, alas! many others, eager to be saved, crowded into the little boat. The sailors tried in vain to keep them back, the little boat was overturned and the prince was drowned.⁸

Short paragraphs, invented dialogue, the combination of Henry's premonitions with the prince's chivalric bravery and its sad consequences make for a dramatic and touching narrative. Marshall is, however, not finished yet. She now moves her narrative focus from the king and his two doomed children to another trinity of characters.

The *White Ship* sank fast, until only the mast was seen above the water. Clinging to it were two men ... One of these men was a noble called Geoffrey de l'Aigle. The other was a poor butcher of Rouen, called Berthold.

As they clung there, a third man appeared swimming through the waves. It was the captain, FitzStephen.

"What of the prince?" he asked.

"The prince is drowned," replied Geoffrey.

"Ah, woe is me!" cried FitzStephen, and throwing up his arms, he sank.

Hour after hour the two men clung to the mast. They were numbed with cold and perishing from hunger. Again and again, as long as they had strength, they called aloud for help. But there was no one to hear. The bright stars twinkled overhead and the moon shone calmly, making paths of shining silver over the still water. But no voice answered their cries.

All through the terrible long night the noble and the butcher talked and tried to comfort each other. But towards morning the noble became exhausted. "Good-bye, friend," he whispered to Berthold, "God keep you. I

can hold out no longer." Then he slipped into the water, and Berthold was left alone.

When the wintry sun rose, Berthold, faint and benumbed, was still clinging to the mast.⁹

Marshall concludes her account with the 'never smiling again' finale which Molly Hughes recalled from her history story book. The news of the sinking of the *White Ship* is brought to the court, but no one dares tell the king about the death of his children. After three days, a nobleman sends in his son to stammer out the story:

As Henry listened, his hands clutched his robe, his lips moved, but no sound came. Then suddenly he fell senseless to the floor, and the little boy, now quite frightened, burst into loud sobbing.

At the sound of the fall the nobles rushed into the room. They lifted the King and placed him upon a couch. He lay there with white face and closed eyes. When he opened his eyes again there was a look in them that no one had seen before; his face was lined and drawn with sorrow, and no one ever saw him smile again.¹⁰

This dramatic anecdote was – naturally enough - chosen for illustration. Forrest's image is a particularly effective one. To the left sits the apparently transfixed king, against a background featuring the royal coat of arms, blue and red quarters, with rampant leopards and fleur de lys. Seated on a throne, he is enveloped in a red robe, and has his hands – one with a ring – on his knees: his hieratic pose recalls depictions of kings in medieval manuscripts.¹¹ The boy, whose blue garments and red shoes, continue the colour scheme, kneels before him in profile, against a perhaps significantly grey tapestry background. The image deliberately destabilises the iconography of feudal allegiance, apparently featuring a lord kneeling to swear allegiance. But the king's closed body language, his rigid hands 'clutching his robe' which are echoed by the boy's tentatively extended ones, his headgear – a bonnet instead of a crown - and his faraway gaze which does not meet the viewer's, all suggest the vulnerability and distress of this apparently powerful figure. The child reader is effectively drawn into the narrative of both text and image through predictable identification with the boy messenger.

Many other similar historical anecdotes find their way into Marshall's narrative: she recounts, for instance, the traditional explanation of the origin of Augustine's mission

to England, describing how the future Pope Gregory the Great was attracted by the beautiful appearance of some child-slaves for sale in Rome. Note, once again, Marshall's use of an anecdote involving children, which plays to her child audience:

A very tender look came into Gregory's eyes as he stood and watched them playing. Then he sighed, for he saw by the chains round their necks that they were to be sold as slaves. "Poor children," he said, "so far from home!" He knew they must come from some far-off country because all the people in his own land had dark faces and black hair.

"Where do these children come from?" he asked, turning to the man who had charge of them.

"From the island called Britain," replied the man, "but the people are called Angles."

"Angles," said Gregory, as he gently put his hand on their curly heads, "nay, not Angles but angels they should be called."¹²

Again, she tells the tale with considerable poetic license, turning the children into agents of history by postulating that some of these children must have returned as missionaries to their own people, accompanying Augustine.¹³ Similarly, when describing the clash between Henry II and Thomas A'Becket, she is unable to resist prefacing it with the romantic tale of his parents, Gilbert and his Saracen bride, Rohesia.¹⁴ She concludes her account with the phlegmatic but unapologetic statement that 'I must tell that some people say that this story of Gilbert and Rohesia is only a fairy tale. Perhaps it is'.¹⁵ Other well-worn but often apocryphal anecdotes which Marshall retains in her text include King Alfred and the cakes;¹⁶ the tale of Prince Edward, the future King Edward I, and the poisoned dagger;¹⁷ the tale of the future Henry V and Judge Gascoigne, a Shakespearean episode;¹⁸ Queen Margaret of Anjou and the robbers;¹⁹ the princes in the Tower murdered by their wicked uncle Richard III;²⁰ and the tale of Queen Elizabeth, Sir Walter Raleigh and his cloak.²¹

Unsurprisingly, these particular tales are often the subject of an illustration, which often draws on a established visual tradition for the representation of English traditional historical episodes, often dating back to the eighteenth-century and even before. Like Marshall, Forrest was accessing and exploiting a narrative tradition at odds with the more positivist and scientific developments of the later nineteenth-century history book and historical textbook. Roy Strong has identified no less than

17 paintings by British artists between 1769 and 1893 which illustrate subjects involving the Princes in the Tower, although not all focus on their murder.²² The two most important in terms of influence on Forrest's image, however, are the 1830 painting by the French artist Paul Delaroche, and John Everett Millais's 1878 painting, *The Princes in the Tower*. Forrest conflates the two images, although the Delaroche is clearly the more influential, suggesting to the artist the background four poster bed and the panelling on the chest. Both paintings have obviously shaped the pose of the two boys, with interlocking hands, and the Millais has provided the gaping abyss which hints at the impending threat to their lives. The pose of the younger prince suggests that he can hear the approaching murderers (as both Delaroche and Millais had also intended to suggest), which sets Forrest's illustration slightly at odds with its caption: one would expect Richard of York to look bored, rather than tense, if he is experiencing, not the apprehension of a victim, but the 'long and dreary' days of a prisoner. Other illustrations, too, clearly owe much to the late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century tradition of visual representations of English historical anecdotes in both illustrations and paintings. The tale of Mary, Queen of Scots – which Marshall presented as 'The Story of a Most Unhappy Queen'²³ – is accompanied by an image of Mary in captivity. The despondent pose of the queen clearly derives from Joseph Severn's 1850 painting, *Mary Queen of Scots at Lochleven Castle* (Victoria and Albert Museum), although the figures demanding her abdication have necessarily been removed. Moreover, Forrest has obviously attempted to render her costume more historically accurate by largely imitating the garments she is wearing in the sixteenth-century portrait by Rowland Lockey at Hardwick Hall, or the seventeenth-century Memorial portrait, itself based on the earlier image. The crucifix which she holds in the Memorial portrait now appears on the table, while her prayer book is deposited on a nearby chest. Similarly, Forrest's image of the death of Nelson is obviously strongly indebted to the extremely well-known paintings of Benjamin West of the death of Wolfe and Daniel Maclise of the death of Nelson.

Such is Marshall's emphasis on the legendary and traditional narrative of English history that the claim that W.C. Sellars and R. J. Yeatman based their classic spoof of the Victorian and Edwardian children's history book, *1066 and All That*, at least partially on Marshall's *Our Island Story*, seems extremely likely. As is well-known,

Sellars and Yeatman's account of English history claimed to comprise 'all the parts you can remember': this turned out to be all the traditional anecdotes, often in a muddled form and allied with a tone of patriotic celebration of Britain as 'top nation', which is very reminiscent of many Victorian and Edwardian children's history books, but most particularly Marshall's *Our Island Story*. A comparison of Marshall's account of the murder of Arthur of Brittany by his uncle King John seems extraordinarily similar to Sellars' and Yeatman's 'Tragedy in Little'. Marshall's description reads as follows:

John was wicked and wily, and he easily got Arthur into his power and shut him up in prison ... Prince Arthur was placed in the charge of a man called Hubert, and wicked King John ordered this man to put out Arthur's eyes.

Hubert actually said he would do this cruel deed. One morning he brought two men into Arthur's room, ready to put out his pretty blue eyes with their dreadful hot irons.

Arthur was a gentle, loving boy, and he was fond of his stern gaoler, and Hubert in his own rough way was fond of the little prince. Now he felt sad and sick at heart at the thought of what he had to do.

"Are you ill?" said Arthur. "You look so pale. I wish you were a little ill so that I could nurse you and show you how much I love you," he added.

When Arthur spoke to him so kindly the tears came into Hubert's eyes. But he brushed them away and determined to do what the King had commanded.

"I am not ill, but your uncle has commanded me to put out your eyes," he said roughly.

"To put out my eyes! Oh, you will not do it, Hubert?"

"I must."

"Oh, Hubert! Hubert! how can you?" said Arthur, putting his arms round Hubert's neck. "When your head ached only a little I sat up all night with you. Now you want to put out my eyes. These eyes that never did, nor never shall, so much as frown upon you."

... Arthur begged and prayed till Hubert could resist no longer, and he sent the wicked men with their dreadful red-hot irons away.

But Hubert was afraid that King John would be angry because his orders had not been obeyed, so he told him the cruel deed had been done, and that Prince Arthur had died of grief and pain.

Then wicked King John was glad. But the people both in France and England were very sad when they heard this news. Every one mourned for the young prince. All through the land bells were tolled as if for a funeral.

There was so much anger against John, and so much sorrow for the prince, that at last Hubert told the people that what he had said was not true, and that Arthur was still alive ...

But King John's heart was black and wicked, and he could not rest while he knew that Prince Arthur lived. So one dark night he came to the castle in which his nephew was kept prisoner.

After that night no one ever saw Prince Arthur again. Next morning when the sun shone in at the narrow window where he used to sit it shone into an empty room. For Arthur's poor little body was lying at the bottom of the Seine, with a great wound in his heart made by his wicked uncle's cruel, sharp knife.

The emphasis on Arthur's littleness and John's wickedness – on Arthur's blue eyes and Hubert's histrionic tears – seem deliberately parodied in the version of the tale in *1066 and All That*, which reads:

John had a little nephew who was called little Arthur, who was writing a little History of England in quite a small dungeon, and whose little blue eyes John had ordered to be put out with some weeny red-hot irons. The gaoler Hubert, however, who was a Good Man, wept some much that he put out the red-hot irons instead. John was therefore compelled to do the deed himself with a large, smallish knife, thus becoming the first memorable wicked uncle.²⁴

Although the theme of littleness clearly owes something to another famous children's history book – Lady Callcott's *Little Arthur's History of England* (1835) – it seems extremely likely that Marshall's *Our Island Story* is one of the targets of this parodic history of England.

National Narrative: an Imperial Island

Marshall's narrative skills serve an agenda: her book is not just a story, but an island story, celebrating a national narrative of progressive and benign development, but also the continuity, democracy, and inclusivity - in terms of class, gender, and ethnicity - of the British identity which she articulates and reinforces through her rehearsal of traditional historical anecdotes. The choice of Australian children, the offspring of a British father, as the audience in the framing device is not a random one: Marshall clearly intends her narrative of the distant island home to serve as a means of creating a sense of common imperial identity and destiny. Her narrative, therefore, gives

considerable attention to the creation of the British empire and, in particular, the ethics of imperialism.

One of the key features of this narrative of progress is the tendency to present periods of conflict and fracture as necessary staging posts towards the development of the contemporary British empire, embodying the values of freedom and democracy. This is particularly apparent in Marshall's treatment of early British history, and the successive conquests of the Romans, the Saxons, the Vikings, and the Normans. Marshall systematically presents the indigenous people of the island as brave defenders who often possess virtues unknown to their conquerors – and offers a lesson on the ethics of imperialism. The Romans, she tells her readers, were indeed 'very clever', but they were 'a very greedy people, and as soon as they heard of a new country, they wanted to conquer it and call it part of the Roman Empire'. Caesar's invasion is enabled, Marshall points out, by the work of galley slaves, who have 'a dreadful life'. By comparison, the native Britons are freemen, and although less well equipped than their Roman adversaries, they are rightly held to be 'very big and brave and fierce'. As Caesar approaches the coast, he is 'saw with surprise that the whole shore was covered with men ready for battle'.²⁵ This scene is naturally enough chosen for illustration: despite their impending defeat, the Britons stand above their foes on the high white cliffs of Dover, dominating the Roman ships below. The equality and democracy of their society – as well as their more primitive and disorganised military tactics – are stressed by their apparent lack of a leader and any regimented order. However, they all hold spears and appear in defensive readiness. The Roman ships below, by contrast, advance in clear order; we cannot see their crews, which favours our identification with the beleaguered Britons, who are represented as individuals, albeit similarly clothed. These themes – the courage of the Britons and their love of freedom, the nature of 'good' imperialism, and the inclusivity of British identity – are further stressed in Marshall's account of Boadicea's revolt against Roman occupation and exploitation. Marshall emphasizes once again the greed of the Romans, explaining how Boadicea's husband had bequeathed half of his wealth to the Emperor, 'thinking that his dear ones would be left in peace', only for the widow and children to find themselves cruelly robbed of their half. Boadicea is, however, 'a very brave woman' who fights back against her

persecutors, who ‘thought very little of their own women, and ... did not understand that many of the women of Britain were as brave and as wise as the men, and quite as difficult to conquer’.²⁶ She stirs up the men of her tribe to attack the Romans by both her beauty and her ferocity, but particularly by her rhetoric which stresses the importance of liberty: ‘Is it not better to be poor and free than to have great wealth and be slaves?’. After the Britons are crushed – which, Marshall points out, comes only after many Roman defeats – Boadicea commits suicide with her daughters rather than ‘than that they should fall again into the hands of the Romans’, exhibiting to the last a British love of freedom.²⁷ Forrest’s illustration once again reinforces the message of the text: in it, Boadicea exhorts the Iceni tribesmen energetically, the terracotta shade of her cloak and her auburn hair symbolising visually her fiery words and contrasting with the blue tunics of the men. Significantly, rather than placing her on the ‘mound of earth’ which Marshall describes in the text, Forrest chooses to place her on the same level as her subjects, stressing equality rather than hierarchy; a tree behind her perhaps deliberately hints at her strength and resolution, which is also symbolised by her spear, which has a larger head than any of those carried by her followers. Eventually, the Britons are – in Marshall’s opinion – only successfully Romanised by those Romans who, like Julius Agricola and Hadrian, ‘tried to understand the people’ and acted with kindness instead of cruelty, working with the native community. So, ‘although the Britons always fought against the Romans, they ... learned many things from them’, in particular the arts of civilisation and Christianity.²⁸

As invaders, Marshall clearly prefers the Saxons to the Romans, because they exhibit the ability to be absorbed into English life and culture far more easily: she comments that after a few hundred years, they ‘forgot that they had ever lived in any other country [and] ... instead of fighting against England, they began to fight for and love the land as their own’.²⁹ From the Anglo-Saxon settlers comes a model king, in Marshall’s opinion: Alfred the Great who did ‘great things for his people’, and ‘fought only to save his country and his people’.³⁰ Similarly the Viking or Danish invaders prove to be adaptable to English culture and custom: the Danish king Canute did not start by being a good king, Marshall informs us, but in the end ‘he seems to have ruled so well that the English came to love him almost as if he had been an

English king'.³¹ The Viking settlers follow his example: 'The Danes began to forget that they had ever lived in any other country, and lived like Englishmen, taking English ways and customs for their own.'³²

The Norman conquest is presented by Marshall in a patriotic mould very similar to the Roman occupation. Once again, the virtues of the native people are contrasted with the vices of their conquerors. Harold is the hero of Marshall's account of the conquest, and he is contrasted – not only with William I – but also with Edward the Confessor, who had 'lived all his life in Normandy, and ... liked the Normans better than the English'. When he becomes king of England, Edward brings Norman friends over with him, who abuse English hospitality: 'Now the English have ever been hospitable, but an Englishman's house is his castle. He will give freely, but he does not like to be bullied and robbed'.³³ Worse still, Edward promises the throne after his death to his cousin, William of Normandy: Marshall comments:

He could not give away the crown of England to any one without the consent of the people ... The kings of England had really no power to act in great matters without calling together a council of the nobles and wise men. The English had always been a free people, who had a share in governing themselves. Their kings had been kings, not tyrants.³⁴

By contrast, Harold – who, according to Marshall, becomes the *de facto* ruler during Edward's last years, 'governed well, for the love of England filled his heart': indeed, he even banishes his own brother Tostig, 'because he governed his earldom badly', for Harold 'loved his country' even more than his family.³⁵ Unsurprisingly, at Edward's death, 'the people chose Harold Godwin to be their king', rather than the dynastic heir, Edgar Aetheling, who had lived all his life in Hungary, and 'did not understand the English language and English ways'. Knowing that Harold was 'brave' and 'wise', they acclaim him at his coronation with 'a cry of love and gratitude'.³⁶ When William proposes to usurp the throne of this people's king, his nobles initially refuse, expressing their feat of the English who are 'a great and brave people' and it is only promises of great rewards which tempts them into agreement with their duke.³⁷ Harold dies 'fighting for the freedom of his people and his country' at the Battle of Hastings,³⁸ and his successor, though crowned king, is rejected by the English, and suffers from a series of risings.³⁹ Although the risings are crushed, the

English spirit survives the Norman Conquest, as the Britons' essential virtues had survived the Roman occupation. Both William's successors, William Rufus and Henry I are – in Marshall's narrative – chosen by the English people over Robert Curthose, the candidate preferred by the Norman barons, because both kings are born in England and speak the English tongue. Indeed, Henry I's example of marriage with an Englishwoman was, Marshall tells her readers, imitated by other Normans, 'so that the hatred between the two races began to disappear'.⁴⁰

Marshall's emphases on both the freedom-loving character of the English and the continuity of the English spirit is continued in her treatment of the reign of King John and the promulgation of Magna Carta in 1215. She reminds her readers:

You remember that King Henry I. had granted a Charter of Liberties to the people. That charter had been broken, set aside and forgotten. Stephen Langdon and the barons now drew up another charter which they determined to make John grant to them. This charter was much the same as that of Henry, only it gave still greater liberty to the people. It is called the Magna Charta or Great Charter ...

The charter is very long and some of it you would find difficult to understand, but I will tell you a few of the things in it, for the Magna Charta is the foundation of all our laws and liberty.

"No free man," it says, "or merchant or peasant shall be punished a great deal for a very little fault. However bad they may have been we will not take their tools or other things by which they earn their living, away from them."

"No free man shall be seized, or put in prison, or have his goods or lands taken from him, or be outlawed or exiled, or in any way brought to ruin, unless he has been properly judged and condemned by the law of the land."

"To no man will we sell, or deny, or delay right or justice."

These things seem to us now quite natural and right, so you can imagine what evil times these were when the King was unwilling to grant such liberty to his people.⁴¹

She stresses firmly that the charter represents a long-standing English tradition of freedom.

... this charter, against which John fought so fiercely, was nothing new; the laws and promises it contained were the laws and promises of Edward the Confessor, of Alfred the Great. But they were also the laws and promises

which the foreign kings of England had broken and trampled on ever since William the Conqueror had won the battle of Hastings.⁴²

This significant moment in the history of English freedoms is, naturally enough, the subject of an illustration by Forrest, which draws on the traditional iconography of the scene: as in many Victorian textbook illustrations, the king is shown seated at a table in a tent at Runnymede, signing the charter in the presence of (armed barons) and a clerical figure who is probably Stephen Langdon, the archbishop of Canterbury. More unusually, the image foregrounds two boys, probably intended to be pages: their inclusion acts as a bridging device, allowing the child-reader to identify with and even enter into the scene in which the pages act as witnesses. Marshall's account of the Magna Carta and its freedoms is further reinforced by her coverage of the Barons' Wars of Henry III's reign. In this chapter, she stresses that Henry had been encouraged to breach the Charter by foreign French favourites, and was rightly challenged by Simon de Montfort, who 'if he was French in name, ... was English at heart' and beloved of the people. Although he becomes 'the father of the English parliament', he is defeated by Prince Edward – the future Edward I. However, Marshall is quick to stress that his legacy is not lost: the prince 'had been his [Simon's] pupil and had learnt much from him.' Marshall's narrative of English liberty is continued through *Our Island Story*, with chapters devoted to – for instance – Jenny Geddes's defiance of the new Prayer Book in 1637. This episode is tellingly entitled 'How a Woman Struck a Blow for Freedom' and Marshall is careful to draw out the moral, avoiding the issue of religious controversy:

If you should ever go to St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh you will see there a brass plate in memory of Jenny Geddes and her deed. It is set there, not because it is right or wrong to use a Prayer Book, not because it is better to worship God in one way rather than another, but because it is right that people should be free to pray to God and worship God in their own way. Neither Pope nor King has a right to say how any man or woman shall pray, and it is not because Jenny Geddes fought against a Prayer Book, but because she struck a blow for freedom, that we remember her.⁴³

This was not the only occasion when she re-interprets an act of religious conviction as an expression of the freedom-loving character of the British. Whilst describing the

events of Mary I's reign, Marshall had already presented the deaths of the Protestant martyrs as a defence of liberty as much as religious sectarianism:

These men and women who suffered death so cheerfully for their religion fought for British freedom as much as Caractacus, or Harold or any of the brave men of whom you have heard. And it was much harder to die as they did, than to fall in battle fighting for their country with sword and spear. So when you hear such names as Rogers, Hooper, Ridley, Latimer, and Cranmer, honour them as heroes, and think gratefully of the many, many others, whose names we shall never know, but who suffered as bravely.⁴⁴

This theme climaxes in chapter 50, where Marshall describes two great steps for democracy and liberty taken in William IV's reign: the 1832 Reform Act, extending the franchise and making parliament more representative of the new industrial communities, and the 1834 Abolition of Slavery.⁴⁵

Other themes identified in Marshall's coverage of early British history are similarly pursued throughout the whole text of *Our Island Story* – in particular, the emphasis on a brave island people whose empire grows to include many races, governed wisely to their benefit. Marshall often spends a good deal of words on the description of successful military campaigns against the natural foe, the French: most of the four chapters she writes on Edward III's reign deal with the battles of Sluys, Crecy and Poitiers, and she presents Edward as the archetypal chivalric monarch in many ways, stressing his role as the founder of the Order of the Garter and the father of the gallant Black Prince. Forrest's illustration of Edward making his son a member of the Order reinforces this message, showing the king, sporting rich garb and a crown and accompanied by two ladies (an allusion, perhaps, to the act of royal gallantry in which the order allegedly was established), placing the garter on the leg of a teenage boy in full armour, with an audience of soldiers. However, Marshall does not fail to recall the burden of taxation imposed on the people by the cost of this essentially unjustified war.⁴⁶ Marshall is similarly ambiguous about the conquests of Henry V, the victor of Agincourt: she summarises his reign with the comment that 'He was a wise king and ruled well, yet his great battles are what we hear most of in his reign, and they brought suffering and sorrow to many of his people'.⁴⁷ Ultimately, such aggressive wars against France, although they exhibit the bravery of king and people, are not the kind of courage or the variety of imperialism which she admires. Her presentation of

the English defeat of the Spanish Armada is clearly a more attractive subject: it shows the English people defending themselves, as ‘Once again, as in the days of the Romans and ... the Danes, the little green island in the lonely sea was threatened with conquerors coming in great ships’.⁴⁸ Marshall describes with relish the rallying of ‘men young and old ... eager to fight for their Queen and for their country’, the ‘brave words’ of the Queen herself, and the cool courage exhibited by Drake, who continues his game of bowls when the Spanish ships are sighted off Plymouth.⁴⁹ Forrest provides the inevitable illustration of Drake engaged in his sport, while a couple of gentlemen in the background observe the approaching Armada: the iconography of the image seems to draw loosely on John Seymour Lucas’s late nineteenth-century image of *The Armada in Sight*. The later Battle of Trafalgar is given similar treatment, with an emphasis on the patriotic heroism of Nelson and the energetic response of the whole British people – ‘Everyone was ready for the ogre Napoleon who never came’.⁵⁰ Forrest’s accompanying illustration of the death of Nelson notably highlights the common sailor: there are four sailors – one of whom supports the dying hero – and only one officer in the scene, in contrast with earlier images of the same subject such as Maclise’s.

The inclusivity of British imperial identity is a key theme for Marshall, and she presents English internal imperialism as a case-study of how to achieve an ethical empire. As a Scotswoman herself, she is careful to present the union of England and Scotland as a voluntary and mutually beneficial development. Edward I’s earlier, less successful attempt at taking Scotland by force is fully detailed, and Marshall makes it clear that the Scots had right on their side, as the English king had no proper authority over them.⁵¹ She concludes that:

The battle of Bannockburn is the greatest battle ever fought on Scottish ground. It is great not because so many noble men fell upon the field; but because at one blow it made the Scots free.⁵²

Union between England and Scotland, Marshall points out, emerges through unexpected and peaceful means, not the aggressive act of conquest. She reflects thus on the union of the crowns which follows Elizabeth I’s death, when James VI of Scotland inherited her throne:

For hundreds of years the kings of England had tried to conquer Scotland, and make Scotland and England one kingdom under one king. Many dreadful battles had been fought, many brave people had been killed. The Scots had lost many battles, but they had never been conquered, and at last the kings of England had almost given up hope of ever being able to conquer them. But now, what they had longed for, and fought for in vain, happened quite quietly and naturally, although not at all in the way that they had expected. Instead of an English King conquering and ruling over Scotland, a Scottish King came to rule over England.⁵³

From this union of the crowns, Marshall argued, came further constitutional union, as ‘Wise men saw that there could be no real union until there was only one Parliament, until English and Scots met and discussed the laws together’. She uses the occasion of the Union of 1707 to describe the composition of the Union Jack, a clear attempt to present the unions with Scotland and Ireland as essentially co-operative alliances of equals.⁵⁴ This message is further re-iterated in her later description of the union with Ireland, which she describes as a defensive necessary measure to prevent a conquest of Ireland by Napoleon and the work of ‘wise men’ including Pitt the Younger.⁵⁵ This analysis is further supported by Forrest’s illustration of the three flags of the individual nations, and the two union flags – the only one of his illustrations apart from the cover illustration, which does not depict a scene from British history.

The history of ethical imperialism is continued by Marshall in her account of the expansion of the British empire in the eighteenth century: chapters 93 – ‘The Story of the Black Hole of Calcutta’- and 94 – ‘The Story of how Canada was Won’ – are tellingly juxtapositioned with chapter 95 – ‘The Story of how America was lost’. The first of the three chapters details the British defence of their possessions in India and demonstrates through the example of the Black Hole how unfit the native princes are to govern without British support,⁵⁶ while the second describes French attempts to hem in the British colonies in North America, and their defeat at Quebec by the heroic Wolfe, who only wishes to serve his country.⁵⁷ A much less appealing picture of British imperialism emerges in the third chapter. Here Marshall espouses the cause of the American colonists, describing George III’s attempt to tax them without giving them appropriate parliamentary representation as ‘unreasonable’ and stressing that the colonists ‘looked upon Britain as their mother-country [and] ... talked of it as ‘home’’.⁵⁸ While the preservation of Canada against an aggressive enemy is seen as an act of benign protection by Britain, exploitation of the American colonists is seen

as an infringement of their liberties as fellow-Britons and a defiance of the rules of parliamentary government. Marshall concludes her coverage of the eighteenth-century British empire by reminding her young readers of a less warlike and more beneficial means of practising imperialism through a 'peaceful battle – the battle of industries and invention'. She devotes a chapter to the life of Richard Arkwright, the inventor of the spinning jenny, with particular attention to his career as a barber who secured trade by undercutting the opposition. Her final remarks reflect on the importance of free trade as a means of extending the British imperial identity:

When Watt and Stephenson made their engines and built railways, when British steamships carrying British goods sailed proudly over the seas, Britain was more than ever mistress of the waves, and she was also the workshop and the market of the world.⁵⁹

Marshall's coverage of the reign of Victoria plays on the same themes: the inclusivity of British imperial identity, the importance of ethnical imperialism, the extension of parliamentary rights and freedoms to appropriate colonies, and the role of free trade and enterprise in binding together the nations of the empire. She opens her coverage of the Victorian empire with a description of the 1851 Exhibition as a vehicle for international co-operation and the support of trade. The organiser of the exhibition, Prince Albert, she stresses, is himself a symbol of adoption of the British identity, as 'Although he was German, he learned to speak English almost perfectly, a thing which some of our German kings never both to do'. She continues with a description of the aims of the exhibition:

The Prince wanted to help trade and to keep peace. So he asked people to come from all parts of the world and bring with them the beautiful and useful things which were made in their countries, and also the things which grew there, such as plants and fruits. These were all to be gathered together in one great building so that the people of each country might see what the people in other countries were doing, and, having seen, might go home with new ideas. In this way the trade of the whole world would be helped. The Prince thought, too, that if people of different countries met together and came to know each other in this friendly manner, they would be less likely to want to fight with each other.⁶⁰

Later chapters detail the sieges of Cawnpore and Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny, laying emphasis on the cruelty and treachery of Indian leaders such as Nana Shahib as an implicit justification of British imperial activity and, in particular, the British

decision to suppress the rule of the East India Company and to replace it with a Vice-regency.⁶¹ By contrast, the chapters on Australia and New Zealand describe how colonies which are initially peopled with convicts and cannibals – outcasts and aliens - move towards civilisation, Christianity, and limited self-governance within the empire. Marshall concludes her chapter on Australia with the reflection that:

Australia has grown quickly into a great and wealthy country. I cannot tell you the history of it here, but although it is now called the Commonwealth of Australia, and has a Parliament of its own, it is still part of the Empire of Greater Britain.⁶²

The inclusivity of the British imperial identity is even more apparent in the finale to the chapter on New Zealand. Marshall writes, with a touch of the suffragist in her prose:

New Zealand has become an important part of the British Empire. Instead of two thousand white people there are now about seven hundred thousand in the islands. It is a self-governing colony and, like Australia, has a Parliament of its own, and in New Zealand the women help to choose the members for Parliament, just as the men do.⁶³

Marshall's final chapter – which covers the Boer War – succeeds in uniting most of her key themes: patriotic defence of country, parliamentary democracy, and the inclusivity of the British imperial identity are all touched upon. Marshall's explanation of the causes of the conflict stresses the continuity of the British pursuit of parliamentary freedoms and the importance of including all subjects appropriately within a state structure:

From the very beginning of our story you have seen how Britons have fought for freedom, and how step by step they have won it, until at last Britons live under just laws and have themselves the power to make these laws. For it is now acknowledged that the Briton who pays taxes has the right to help to frame the laws under which he lives. You remember how America was lost because King George III. tried to force the Americans to pay taxes, although they had not the right to choose and send members to Parliament.

Now the Transvaal was a republic, and the government was in the hands of the Boers, as the South African Dutch had come to be called. Yet in some vague way the Boers owned the Queen of Britain as over-lord. Those who lived in the Transvaal were chiefly Boer farmers, but gold was discovered in the country and then many other people went there hoping to make a great deal of money. Many of these people were British, and although the Boers were not glad to see them, and wished they would keep away from

the land which they considered their very own, these British helped to make the Boer country rich. They paid heavy taxes, but they were called Uitlanders, which means, "outlanders" or "strangers." They were harshly treated in many ways, they were not allowed to vote for members of Parliament, and so had no voice in making the laws under which they had to live.

You have heard how Britons for centuries had fought for this very freedom which was now denied them in South Africa, and you can imagine how hard it was for Britons to bear what seemed to them so great an injustice. This is only one reason why the Boers and Britons could not live in peace together, but it is one which you can understand.⁶⁴

For Marshall, the subject of the Boer War was a sensitive one – ‘the graves it made are hardly green’ – and she is anxious to present the outcome as positive. She stresses that this was an enterprise of the whole empire: ‘Britain was fighting, not for herself, but for her colony, and right or wrong, her colonies stood by her, side by side, and shoulder to shoulder’. She describes the peace-making at more length than the war, stressing that the negotiations took place at Vereeniging – which ‘means ‘union’’ – and that the Boers were ‘treated as the guests of the British, who ... did everything for their comfort’. Forrest’s accompanying illustrations shows – not a scene of battle – but the Boer negotiators being escorted in blindfolds by the Black Watch: it represents a combination of defensive pragmatism and chivalrous care which is suggested in Marshall’s text – and which may be intended to address the contemporary accusations of poor treatment of Boer prisoners in British concentration camps. Marshall concludes with the optimistic and upbeat comment that: ‘The south of Africa is now entirely a British colony, and we hope that soon it will be as loyal, as happy, and as prosperous as any other British colony.’⁶⁵

Just as Sellars and Yeatman had parodied the anecdotal and sentimental tropes of Marshall’s *Our Island Story*, so too did they seem to target the national narrative which she constructed. A classic example of this is their treatment of the signing of the Magna Carta: Marshall had listed its most important clauses, describing it as the foundation of English laws and liberties. Sellars and Yeatman, by contrast, stress that it was fundamentally designed to protect the baronage, and of no relevance to the broader population. They too list the key provisions of the charter, but add the telling phrase in brackets ‘except the Common People’ to the liberties identified, and they

conclude the items with ‘6. That the Barons should not be tried except by a special Jury of other Barons who would understand’.⁶⁶ The scepticism with which the narrative of unfolding liberty and democracy is rendered is matched by their self-justifying and prejudiced version of key conflicts with other nations. While Marshall had described the American War of Independence as a case-study in ethical or constitutional empire – or rather what happened in the absence of it – Sellars and Yeatman’s interpretation is a petulant and biased one: ‘it was unfair because the Americans had the Allies on their side. In many ways, the war was really a draw, since England remained top nation ...’.⁶⁷ To Marshall’s constitutional and apparently objective analysis, they oppose the childish and competitive comments of the bad loser, subverting the narrative of virtuous imperialist governance. Their treatment of Victoria’s reign is, in many ways, very similar to Marshall’s, concentrating on the wars of the growing Empire – but rather than presenting them as part of the growth of an ethical empire, they undermine these ‘Justifiable Wars’ by suggesting that the motives for them are frivolity, ignorant prejudice against other peoples, and even immoral commercial self-interest.⁶⁸ A similar spirit informs the account of the Boer War: our narrators inform us that:

The War was not a very successful one at first, and was quite unfair because the Boers could shoot much further than the English, and also because they were rather despicable in wearing veldt hats and using Pom-Pom bullets.⁶⁹

Reviving and Retelling the National Past: Marshall and her Contemporaries

Marshall’s *Our Island Story* stands out as a currently celebrated example of a certain type of Edwardian child’s book: it revitalises the story-telling, dramatic, and legendary tradition which dates back to Shakespeare, while also constructing and presenting a national narrative of progressive and benign development, but with an emphasis on the continuity, democracy, and inclusivity of British national identity. However, it is not alone in its class: Marshall explicitly separates her work from the contemporary textbook through her dramatic and anecdotal approach, but she does not tell us that it clearly connects with another genre of children’s history writing, the historical fictions of fellow authors such as Rudyard Kipling and Edith Nesbit. Kipling’s historical tales, *Puck of Pook’s Hill* (1906) and its sequel *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), and – although to a lesser extent - Nesbit’s *The Story of the Amulet*

(1906) and *The House of Arden* (1908) clearly celebrate the same tradition of national story-telling which inspires Marshall.

In terms of narrativity, both Kipling and Nesbit employ many of the same or similar literary devices to those of Marshall. All three authors deliberately construct a narrative round episodic tales which offer periodic glimpses into the past: in *Puck of Pook's Hill*, for instance, the tales belong to individual narrators from the past, who are presented to the children, Dan and Una – Kipling's version of Spen and Veda – by the intermediary character of the fairy Puck. They include the Norman Sir Richard Dalyngridge, who is part of the retinue of William the Conqueror, and the Roman centurion Parnesius, who serves on Hadrian's Wall in the fourth century. Similarly, in Nesbit's *The Amulet*, the children are transported to past ancient civilizations by a magic amulet and through the aid of a magic creature, the Psammead; in *The House of Arden*, Edred and Elfrida Arden are enabled to visit preceding periods of English history - which include the time of the Napoleonic wars and the Gunpowder Plot - through the aid of a magic white mole, and a box of historical costumes in an enchanted attic. What Marshall and Forrest aimed to achieve in a metaphoric sense – transferring children into an exciting past – is achieved more literally (in both sense of the word) by Kipling and Nesbit in what critics describe as their 'time-travel' or 'time-slip' stories. Marshall's attention to the role of children in historical events and Forrest's deliberate inclusion of child observers in so many of his images are paralleled in Kipling's construction of children as the audience for figures from the past, and Nesbit's more radical transportation of her principal characters into past ages. As has been pointed by some commentators, the engagement of Nesbit's characters with past societies goes beyond observation to potentially influencing events: when the children in *The Amulet* go back to Celtic Britain to find a mother and a home for an orphaned girl from their own age, they find themselves attempting to persuade Julius Caesar to not invade Britain – and, paradoxically, make him decide to do so on the grounds of its potential interest and wealth.⁷⁰ Similarly, in *The House of Arden*, Elfrida's ill-considered comments on the 5th of November celebrations while visiting the reign of James I may have led – it is never quite clear – to the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot, while her warning to the new queen Anne Boleyn

about her impending doom may not have averted it, but certainly shaped the circumstances of her later arrest.⁷¹

The intermediary role of Puck in Kipling's - and the invented magical characters in Nesbit's tales - reflect the same engagement as Marshall's with the legendary and anecdotal traditions of English history. Indeed, the title of Kipling's second collection of Puck stories - *Rewards and Fairies* - derives from 'The Faeryes' Farewell' by Richard Corbet, a classic sixteenth-century poem concerning the disappearance of the fairy folk, a poem which Puck had quoted when he first encountered Dan and Una, busily re-enacting *Midsummer Night's Dream*, in *Puck of Pook's Hill*.⁷² While Marshall had persistently referred to legendary events such as the reign of Arthur in the early chapters of her tale, so Kipling opened *Puck of Pook's Hill* with the tale of 'Weland's Sword', in which the central character is a Norse god, the smith to his fellow deities and the maker of a 'wonderful rune-carved' magic sword which he gives to an Anglo-Saxon monastic novice. Una recognises Weland from her book of Norse myths, *Heroes of Asgard*.⁷³ As Paul Coates points out, Kipling's sense of the need to recover the legends of the national past is motivated by very similar impulses to that of Marshall:

Weland and his sword ... [was] used to suggest the dependency of civilization on barbarism, the rational order on the powers and mysteries of the non-rational. The fable had provided the hidden side, as opposed to the public political history, of the concept of freedom under the law, and its emergence from the yearnings, deeds, and renunciations of the individuals who do not yet know each other, yet who form almost a kind of collective unconscious.⁷⁴

In the sequel to *Puck of Pook's Hill*, Kipling again uses Scandinavian mythology to suggest that legends explain and contain important messages about the origins of British national identity and character. *Rewards and Fairies* opens with a story - 'Cold Iron' - about a human child, the son of a slave-woman, stolen away by the fairy lord and lady, Sir Huon and Lady Esclairmonde, but returned to humankind by picking up a slave-ring wrought by the Norse god Thor, which makes him a servant to his people.⁷⁵ In the tale 'The Knife and the Naked Chalk', in which a Stone Age man describes how he sacrifices an eye to gain the knives needed to kill the wolves

which endanger the survival of his people, he is identified by them (anachronistically) as the god Tyr.⁷⁶

In *The Story of the Amulet*, Nesbit is less engaged with legendary and mythical elements, but she does not ignore them. The Children in *The Amulet* encounter a god themselves – the Babylonian Nisroch – who frees them from a dungeon in which the King of Babylon has imprisoned them. As they cast around to remember the god's name and summon him, Nesbit mischievously makes them consider her own name as a possibility, drawing attention in a post-modernist motif to the text-as-story and her own role as *deus ex machine*.⁷⁷ Although much of *The Amulet* presents with considerable historical accuracy great civilisations such as the Babylonian and Assyrian empires – it is no coincidence that the book is dedicated to Wallis Budge (1857-1934), the keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities at the British Museum – Nesbit deliberately includes more legendary elements. These include a chapter depicting the fall of Atlantis – surely a warning about the contemporary British empire - not to mention a foray into an ideal future society reminiscent of William Morris's Utopia in *News from Nowhere*.⁷⁸ In *The House of Arden*, it is not national legends, but local legends which matter: knowledge of the legends surrounding the aristocratic house of Arden allows Edred and Elfrida to, firstly, to explore the past history of their own family, and secondly, to regain the family estates and bring home their missing father.⁷⁹

Marshall's systematic use of poetry to dramatise and romanticise the past is also apparent in Kipling's - and to a lesser extent – Nesbit's work. In *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*, literature is 'a passport to the past', as Linda Hall points out:⁸⁰ it is the poetry of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* which summons Puck, while the 'old song' of the Viking captain Othere provokes Sir Richard's story of 'the Knights of the Joyous Venture', and Una's repetition of a passage from Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* calls up Parnesius.⁸¹ But for Kipling, quoting other people's poetry was not sufficient – his stories are interspersed with examples of his own poetry. Kipling uses these poems to summon and dismiss the past – as with Puck's incantation of Oak, Ash and Thorn, or 'Puck's Song' and 'A Charm', the two poems

which open the two books. But he also uses them to re-iterate the themes of the stories, or to present reflections and tangential commentaries on theme: Lisa A. F. Lewis rightly refers to these poems as ‘cross-references’.⁸² The story of the ‘Martlake Witches’ in *Rewards and Fairies*, for instance, is sandwiched between the poems ‘The Way Through the Woods’ and ‘Brookland Road’. The first evokes long-disused paths – Una’s ‘funny little roads that don’t lead anywhere’ which were once so well-known to her early-nineteenth-century interlocutor, Philadelphia: it thus serves to summon up the ghost of the past who can be heard ‘steadily cantering through’ the now deserted woods.⁸³ As Paul Coates argues, the second poem, ‘Brookland Road’, hints at the impact Philadelphia – despite dying while still a teenager – has on the historical record, through the way in which she influences and educates the hearts of the three men who love her.⁸⁴ For Nesbit, poetry plays nothing like as significant a role, but she too presents it as a means to summon up and dismiss the past in *The House of Arden*. The magic white mole – the Moldiwarp – who transports the children to and from the past is initially summoned by an ancient poem relating the legend of Arden, and continues to prefer to be called in verse, forcing Elfrida to compose some very bad doggerel.⁸⁵ Elfrida’s recollection of ‘Remember, Remember the Fifth of November’ proves, however, to summon up the past in a rather dangerous manner, exposing her and her family to the accusation of being involved in the Gunpowder Plot.⁸⁶

The parallels between Marshall’s narrativity – her desire to bring alive the past through dramatic prose, use of poetic quotations, and engagement of her juvenile audience – and the historical fictions of Kipling and Nesbit is very clear. Her presentation of a national narrative also has parallels in the work of contemporaries – most particularly Kipling, who shared her ‘chivalric and politically conservative’ approach to the past.⁸⁷ Although Kipling’s conservatism is of a more sophisticated and reflective kind, there are many similarities between their versions of British history, in particular the insistence on gradual progress and benign development, with an emphasis on the continuity, democratic character, and inclusivity of the British national and imperial identity. By comparison, Nesbit’s Fabian socialist perspective makes her far more critical and far less subtle in her interpretation of the past, which she often sees as an undesirable prelude to a socialist future. However, the present is

often interpreted as still worse (at least for working-class children: Nesbit's protagonists are middle class): on occasion, she even utilises the past to offer a critique of contemporary social ills.

Like Marshall, Kipling tends to present fractures in the historical continuity of the British past as necessary evils and staging posts in the development of the British imperial identity. In *Puck of Pook's Hill*, for instance, Kipling offers an essentially synthetic interpretation of the Norman Conquest, in which the two races, Anglo-Saxon and Norman arrive at a consensus of sorts and the Norman invader becomes part of the community which he conquers. Sir Richard Dalyningridge manages his new English manor with the help of its former owner, Hugh, and eventually marries Hugh's sister, Aelueva. As Puck puts it, 'The Custom of Old England was here before ... Norman knights came and it outlasted them, though they fought against it cruel'. Sir Richard tellingly describes himself as 'a captive', rather than his new Anglo-Saxon underlings, and in the poetic song at the end of the chapter 'Young Men at the Manor', he argues that 'England hath taken me'.⁸⁸ Kipling also celebrates, like Marshall, British bravery and resourcefulness when confronting the foreign foe: the chapter 'Gloriana' in *Rewards and Fairies* celebrates the sacrifice of two young Sussex gentlemen who help to prevent Philip of Spain taking the new English colony of Virginia.⁸⁹

However, Kipling offers a more contemplative and critical perspective on British imperialism, stressing more decidedly than Marshall does the issue of ethics in imperialism. As Paul Coates points out, the underlying theme of *Puck of Pook's Hill* is the 'problem of the creation of a lasting polity through reconciling the weak, defeated, and alien to its institutions ... Barriers are really crossed in the Norman cycle which are remain in the Roman'.⁹⁰ The chapter, 'The Winged Hats', which details the centurion Parnesius's period of service on Hadrian's Wall under Emperor Maximus, offers a very equivocal picture of Roman imperialism which has often been as a reflection on the British involvement in India: Parnesius struggles to behave honestly in a difficult situation, as the Roman occupation of Britain begins to falter and he and his troops find themselves facing a new enemy – the Vikings – and in an

uncertain relationship with the subjugated and slippery Picts. The problems of imperialist powers which fail to understand subject peoples, or to construct an inclusive cultural identity for its nations, are clearly depicted.⁹¹ *Rewards and Fairies*, meanwhile, presents a picture of more sensitive and adaptative forms of imperialism, similar to the Norman Sir Richard's approach in *Puck of Pook's Hill*: Saint Wilfrid's attempt to convert the heathen West Saxon people leads to a genuine friendship with the learned and impressive Meon, and a recognition of the validity of other faiths - and the importance of keeping faith too.⁹² It is also notable that the victims of historical progress and their very real sufferings are more explicitly eulogised in Kipling's stories: the final story in *Rewards and Fairies* depicts with sympathy, if not uncritically, the imaginary after life of Harold the last Anglo-Saxon king of England, had he survived Hastings.⁹³

Similarly, Kipling shares Marshall's democratic and inclusive vision of British identity. The opening poem of *Puck of Pook's Hill* evokes the everyday landscape of Sussex, where Kipling lived, and suggests that this is the site of great historical events, rather than - for instance - a metropolis such as London.⁹⁴ And it proves to be Old Hobden, the hedger, who knows the land and customs, and of course Puck, who is the most important symbol of historical continuity, coming from a family and a place which date back to the Conquest, or possibly even Roman Britain.⁹⁵ In *Rewards and Fairies*, Kipling renews his emphasis on the common people as the agents and bearers of British history and culture: the opening poem, 'A Charm' celebrates the 'mere uncounted folk' who lay beneath English soil, being the true but unseen substance of the British past.⁹⁶ And in this book, Hobden is joined by a larger cast of local worthies, both past and present, who are making or have made the history of Sussex and of the country itself through unostentatious performance of their duty: in the present, old Jim the shepherd, the descendant of the unnamed Stone Age man who brings knives to his people, enabling them to save their flocks, for instance, or the builder Mr Springett and his predecessor, the master-mason of Henry VII's reign, Hal o' the Draft.⁹⁷

Like Marshall, too, Kipling's version of the imperial island nation is an interestingly inclusive one. In *Puck of Pook's Hill*, the company of the Venture of the Joyous Knights who visit Africa in search of gold is an ethnically varied one, including the Viking Witta, the Norman Richard, the Anglo-Saxon Hugh, and the Chinaman Kitai, and the skills and science of all are required for the success of the enterprise.⁹⁸ Perhaps even more astonishingly for those who consider Kipling an incipient racist, the central character of the story 'The Treasure and the Law' is the Jewish merchant, Kadmiel, and he behaves counter to the stereotypical image of the Jewish financier, becoming the architect of English law and liberty. It is he who sacrifices the gold treasure which Sir Richard had won in Africa and hidden at Pevensey Castle to prevent King John buying himself out of signing the Magna Carta in 1215. Puck improves the occasion by stressing the continuity of English history and the organic nature of its development: 'Weland gave the Sword! The Sword gave the Treasure, and the Treasure gave the Law. It's as natural as an oak growing'.⁹⁹ In *Rewards and Fairies*, similarly, the cast of characters who shape the British identity is extremely varied in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and class: it includes young Philadelphia, daughter of Squire Bucksteed of Marklake, Pharoah Lee, the Anglo-French gypsy smuggler, the Northumbrian bishop Saint Wilfrid, and even a seal called Padda. The stress here on the ability of the British empire to embrace a wide range of people and to develop shared constitutional values is very similar to Marshall's, despite the Kipling's more imaginative and subtle engagement with the national past.

By contrast, Nesbit's Fabian socialism produces a national narrative far different from and much less sustained than that of both Kipling and Marshall. In *The Amulet*, the past of many great civilizations seems spectacular but dangerous, but that does not mean that Nesbit endorses contemporary British society as a gratifying progression from these splendid but barbarous days. Indeed, when the Babylonian queen takes up the children's offer to visit their own time, she presents a critique of contemporary capitalist London, commenting on 'how badly you keep your slaves' when she encounters the working-class population.¹⁰⁰ And it is not only the past which seems, in many ways, better than the Edwardian present. Nesbit's socialist agenda is pressed home in a later chapter, when the children are transported to a better future Britain, an age of equality and plenty, which exposes the social ills of what the author calls the

‘sorry-present’.¹⁰¹ As Linda Hall has pointed out, *The House of Arden* constructs a more nostalgic and conservative perspective on the past, focuses as it does on an aristocratic family with a loyal old retainer, Beale, not unlike Hobden, and an ancestral castle. But the continuity of the past is both fragile and exclusive: as Hall puts it, the book ‘has none of the stirring resonance of Kipling’s Puck books, because what Nesbit means ... is only a family’s private past, and not the national story that we can all share in’. For Nesbit, the past is not an island story which can help shape British national and imperial identity: she continues to see ‘history in the light of unreconstructed social practice that needs to be reformed’, inferior to ‘a putative social future’. The national alarms which she describes – for instance, the threat of invasion by France during the Napoleonic wars and the threat of Jacobite conspiracies in 1707 – are comically deflated, turning out to be hoaxes practised by smugglers and a practical joker: in other words, they are not the occasions for patriotic bravery they would be for Marshall and Kipling. The book closes with a bizarre adventure in a hidden South American empire which – despite its contemporary Edwardian setting – is clearly a socialist society of the future similar to that already depicted in *The Amulet*.¹⁰²

Conclusion

Thus Marshall’s *Island Story* is a particularly useful example of the Edwardian child’s history book. In its emphasis on story-telling, its inclusion of legends and anecdotes, and its use of literary quotations, it uses both text and image to bridge the to create an involving and evolving drama for its child readers. It narrates an island story, the tale of national progress and continuity, of a freedom-loving democratic nation which becomes an inclusive and fair-minded empire embracing peoples of all races and extending constitutional benefits to them. In many ways, it shows fundamental similarities with the historical fictions of Kipling and to a lesser extent, Nesbit. Its lasting impact in the minds and imaginations of its reader made this once rather obscure book a key influence on the historical consciousness of the twentieth-century British audience, as the contrasting examples of Sellars and Yeatman’s *1066 and All That* and Antonia Fraser’s popular historical biographies both show.

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- ¹ A. Fraser, 'Great stories that will bring the past to life for a new generation', *The Telegraph*, 23 June, 2005.
- ² Rosemary A. Mitchell, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image, 1830-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 56-83.
- ³ Henrietta E. Marshall, *Our Island Story: A Child's History of England* (1905), v-vi.
- ⁴ Molly V. Hughes, *A London Child of the 1870s* (1934; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977), 42.
- ⁵ Marshall, *Island Story*, 47.
- ⁶ Marshall, *Island Story*, 49.
- ⁷ Marshall, *Island Story*, 51-57. The quotations appear on pages 53 and 54 respectively.
- ⁸ Marshall, *Island Story*, 132-33.
- ⁹ Marshall, *Island Story*, 133-34.
- ¹⁰ Marshall, *Island Story*, 135.
- ¹¹ It may even be influenced by a fourteenth-century miniature image of Henry I in a manuscript in the British Library, Cotton Claud. D11 45 B.
- ¹² Marshall, *Island Story*, 60-61.
- ¹³ Marshall, *Island Story*, 62.
- ¹⁴ Marshall, *Island Story*, 142-44.
- ¹⁵ Marshall, *Island Story*, 144.
- ¹⁶ Marshall, *Island Story*, 70-72.
- ¹⁷ Marshall, *Island Story*, 189-91. Interestingly, although Marshall describes how Edward's wife, Eleanor of Castile, sucks the poison from the wound, rather scientifically and unromantically she attributes his recovery to a clever Eastern doctor.
- ¹⁸ Marshall, *Island Story*, 249-50.
- ¹⁹ Marshall, *Island Story*, 270-71.
- ²⁰ Marshall, *Island Story*, 283-84.
- ²¹ Marshall, *Island Story*, 342.
- ²² R. Strong, *And When Did You Last See Your Father? The Victorian Painter and British History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 159-60.
- ²³ Marshall, *Island Story*, 333-37.
- ²⁴ W. C. Sellars and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That* (1930; London: Magnum Books, 1980), 32.
- ²⁵ Marshall, *Island Story*, 5-6.
- ²⁶ Marshall, *Island Story*, 17-18.
- ²⁷ Marshall, *Island Story*, 18-21.
- ²⁸ Marshall, *Island Story*, 22-25.
- ²⁹ Marshall, *Island Story*, 64.
- ³⁰ Marshall, *Island Story*, 76.
- ³¹ Marshall, *Island Story*, 85.
- ³² Marshall, *Island Story*, 87.
- ³³ Marshall, *Island Story*, 88-89.
- ³⁴ Marshall, *Island Story*, 90-91.
- ³⁵ Marshall, *Island Story*, 91.
- ³⁶ Marshall, *Island Story*, 94, 96.
- ³⁷ Marshall, *Island Story*, 99-100.
- ³⁸ Marshall, *Island Story*, 113.
- ³⁹ Marshall, *Island Story*, 117-121.
- ⁴⁰ Marshall, *Island Story*, 125-26, 129-30.
- ⁴¹ Marshall, *Island Story*, 174.
- ⁴² Marshall, *Island Story*, 176.
- ⁴³ Marshall, *Island Story*, 365.
- ⁴⁴ Marshall, *Island Story*, 328.
- ⁴⁵ Marshall, *Our Island Story*, 466-70.
- ⁴⁶ Marshall, *Our Island Story*, 233.
- ⁴⁷ Marshall, *Our Island Story*, 255-56.
- ⁴⁸ Marshall, *Island Story*, 339.
- ⁴⁹ Marshall, *Island Story*, 339-41.
- ⁵⁰ Marshall, *Island Story*, 453-4.
- ⁵¹ Marshall, *Island Story*, 201.
- ⁵² Marshall, *Island Story*, 211.
- ⁵³ Marshall, *Island Story*, 352.

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- 54 Marshall, *Island Story*, 417-18
- 55 Marshall, *Island Story*, 454.
- 56 Marshall, *Island Story*, 434-36.
- 57 Marshall, *Island Story*, 437-40.
- 58 Marshall, *Island Story*, 442-47.
- 59 Marshall, *Island Story*, 448-452.
- 60 Marshall, *Island Story*, 477.
- 61 Marshall, *Island Story*, 491-98.
- 62 Marshall, *Island Story*, 503.
- 63 Marshall, *Island Story*, 508
- 64 Marshall, *Island Story*, 510-11.
- 65 Marshall, *Island Story*, 511-12.
- 66 Sellars and Yeatman, *1066 and All That*, 33-34.
- 67 Sellars and Yeatman, *1066 and All That*, 94.
- 68 Sellars and Yeatman, *1066 and All That*, 113-4
- 69 Sellars and Yeatman, *1066 and All That*, 117.
- 70 E. Nesbit, *The Story of the Amulet* (London, Penguin Classics, 1996), 179-198
- 71 E. Nesbit, *The House of Arden* (London: Aegypan Press, 2007?), 105-108, 159-61.
- 72 R. Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill* (London, Penguin Books, 1987), 43-46
- 73 Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 51-58.
- 74 P. Coates, *The Day's Work: Kipling and the Idea of Sacrifice* (Madison Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 49.
- 75 R. Kipling, *Rewards and Fairies* (London: Echo Library, 2007), 6-16.
- 76 Kipling, *Rewards and Fairies*, 57-67.
- 77 Nesbit, *Amulet*, 126-29.
- 78 Nesbit, *Amulet*, 157-78, 224-247.
- 79 Nesbit, *Arden*, 15-25, 163-78.
- 80 Linda Hall, 'Ancestral Voices – 'Since Time Everlasting Beyond': Kipling and the Invention of the Time-Slip Story', *Children's Literature in Education*, 34/4 (December, 2003), 312.
- 81 Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 43-45, 79-81, 118-119.
- 82 Lisa A. F. Lewis, 'References', 'Cross-References', and Notions of History in Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*', *English Literature in Transition*, 50/2 (2007), 190-209.
- 83 Kipling, *Rewards and Fairies*, 44-45.
- 84 Coates, *The Day's Work*, 55-57.
- 85 Nesbit, *Arden*, 22-25, 31-32. The moldiwarp does not accept any pre-composed poetry after its first summoning, although Edred does initially of using Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*, just like Dan and Una.
- 86 Nesbit, *Arden*, 105-108.
- 87 W. Wintle, introduction to *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 7.
- 88 Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hills*, 61-77.
- 89 Kipling, *Rewards and Fairies*, 19-28.
- 90 Coates, *The Day's Work*, 45.
- 91 Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 148-64
- 92 Kipling, *Rewards and Fairies*, 106-16.
- 93 Kipling, *Rewards and Fairies*, 149-160.
- 94 Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 41-42.
- 95 Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 53, 134.
- 96 Kipling, *Rewards and Fairies*, 4.
- 97 Kipling, *Rewards and Fairies*, 32-43, 57-66.
- 98 Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 89-96.
- 99 Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 197-209.
- 100 Nesbit, *Amulet*, 136-56.
- 101 Nesbit, *Amulet*, 228-245.
- 102 Linda Hall, 'Aristocratic Houses and Radical Politics: Historical Fiction and the Time-Slip Story in E. Nesbit's *The House of Arden*', *Children's Literature in Education*, 29/1 (1998), 51-58. See Nesbit, *Arden*, 53-80, 167-178.