

Novels of childhood: the question of idealization in twain and ballard



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Eugene Ionesco once remarked that, ' Childhood is the world of miracle or of magic: it is as if creation rose luminously out of the night, all new and fresh and astonishing,' an extremely idealistic perception of children and their lives. Whilst children see the world through this lens of innocence, we sometimes forget that they still see the same world we see, including its horrors. Novels about childhood can be guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light; a light that reflects only the good things surrounding their childhood: their apparent " filtered" and " censored" perspective of the world, a comfortable upbringing, a world of imaginative play and safely nurtured development. An idealised version of the child presents them as someone might want them to be, if everything were perfect; a presentation presumed by a lack of realistic perspective and oversight. However, it cannot be said that novels about childhood are always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light, as throughout different periods of literature, many writers have exhumed a realistic presentation of children and their childhood, presenting both their ups and downs. Although some novels about childhood may present sensationalised detail, for example during the romantic period, with idealised versions of the child being depicted in general, many of these novels are based on the writer's own childhood, or at least aspects of it are. Everyone alive today has experienced childhood and lived through it, including literary writers, and so they are influenced more-so by a realistic viewpoint on childhood, rather than an idealised one. This supports the view that novels about childhood are not always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light, an idea which both the novels, " Huckleberry Finn" and " Empire of the Sun" adhere to, as childhood is

presented in a realistic manner throughout, as it is in many novels about childhood, regardless of when they were written.

There have been many different interpretations of children and childhood throughout literature, which vary depending on when it was written. Even though we can argue that novels about childhood are not always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light, during some periods of time, literature about childhood was shaped by idealistic societal consideration of the child, for example, during the Romantic period. During this time, an idea of “ natural” childhood was brought to the forefront, in favour of ‘ rational education,’ which Wordsworth openly challenged. He reflected the idealistic view that society followed after, that children were divine or quasi-divine, born perfect and much superior to adults, only inherently corrupted by society. He presented the child in an idealistic light within such works as, ‘ We are Seven,’ ‘ The Idiot Boy,’ and Lucy Gray,’ during a time when children’s literature was becoming more and more popular, for example in the form of Charles and Mary Lamb’s, ‘ Tales from Shakespeare,’ in 1807, and Eleanor Sleath’s, ‘ Glenowen.’ This idealised depiction of childhood and the child in literature was instituted during the life-time of Rosseau, a political philosopher and educationalist, who lived between 1712 and 1778. Rosseau believed that, ‘ From the moment of life, men ought to begin learning to deserve to live; and as at the instant of birth we partake of the rights of citizenship...if there are laws for the age of maturity, there ought to be laws for infancy.’ He pioneered the idea that we are inherently good, but become corrupted by society, through his novel, ‘ Emile,’ published in 1762, and advocated that a life lived attending to nature made living a life of virtue

more likely. This idealistic representation of the birth state of children influenced the literature of the Romantic era, and also in particular, the work of William Blake in, 'Songs of Innocence and Experience, published in 1789. He further developed this idea, revealing his belief that children lose their innocence through exploitation, education and religion, a belief he expressed in his works, such as, 'The Shepherd,' 'The Little Black Boy,' and, 'The Chimney Sweeper,' as well as, 'The Little Boy Lost.' These explorations of the child and the theme of childhood within different eras of literature suggest that novels of childhood are guilty of presenting the child in an idealistic light, however this is not always the case, and so we reject this idea as a permanent structure and theme in novels about childhood. Firstly, the Augustans believed that the child was born into sin and is by nature wilful and in mortal need of discipline, an idea linked to 'The Fall of Mankind,' referring to Adam and Eve in the Bible. At this time, there was no children's literature and novels like 'Robinson Crusoe,' were seen as didactic, which suggest that children were scarcely depicted in literature at all, never mind in an idealistic light. It is evident that "Huckleberry Finn" is a piece of literature from the Victorian era, whilst, on the other hand, "Empire of the Sun" is from the Modern era, therefore both are influenced by different societal backgrounds and so also by different societal attitudes towards children and childhood. It just so happens that both are set and written in times when attitudes to children were not idealistic, but were presented more realistically, particularly in literature. Therefore, from the Augustinian example, and both these novels, we can conclude that novels about childhood, regardless of when they are written, are not always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light.

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Twain writes “Huckleberry Finn,” during the Victorian period, a time in which children’s literature was very popular, such as Lear’s, ‘A Book of Nonsense,’ and Lewis Carroll’s, ‘Alice in Wonderland.’ Many writers during this era presented the child in a realistic, rather than an idealistic light, choosing to expose the injustices of childhood in their poems and novels, for example, in, ‘Jane Eyre,’ of 1847, Charlotte Bronte becomes one of the first novelists to use a child as a protagonist, writing in the first person to explore the cruelty and social attitudes to children during this time, as well as to education, women and social class. Presenting the cruelty and unpleasant social attitudes towards children is hardly an idealistic depiction of a child, but perhaps one in a more realistic light. Charles Dickens also presents the child in his novels very realistically, exploring themes such as crime, poverty and prostitution, particularly in *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*. Dickens battled for school and prison reform during his life-time, being against child labour and using his writing to champion children’s cause. Therefore, he needed to present children in his novels about childhood in a realistic, rather than an idealistic light, to achieve his agenda and objectives. And so it cannot be said that novels about childhood are always guilty of presenting the child in an idealistic light. This is also true of “Huckleberry Finn,” as a novel. Twain follows the example of these other Victorian novels and exposes society’s flaws through his presentation of the child, conforming to many of the features of the Victorian novel, mainly the authorial intrusion, for example in, ‘You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, but that ain’t no matter,’ in order to present Huck in a realistic way, through the spontaneous and direct approach of a child to individuals and situations, because of their inquisitive

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nature and desire to build new relationships and establish facts, to present a perceived intelligence, no matter how forward their approach may seem, and how unqualified they are to be the leader in relaying a plot-line or driving a story. Twain's, "Huckleberry Finn," disproves the theory, that novels about childhood are always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light, in its plot, in which Huck Finn himself, the protagonist, goes on a journey down the river with a black man named Jim, encountering many obstacles and adventures along the way, whilst developing many aspects of his personality, particularly his moral conscience, through his contemplation of the moral correctness of Jim's freedom, and in his noticing of the influence of his friend Tom Sawyer. The plot focusses on cons, lies, murders and basic survival, which is hardly an idealised version of childhood experiences, an 'ideal' child of this time being seen and not heard, conforming to strict discipline and moral teaching. And so novels about childhood are not always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light, as Huck Finn is presented as living an unpleasant, uncomfortable life at times, on the run from society, literally, but also metaphorically, whether he realises it himself or not.

In comparison, J. G. Ballard's, "Empire of the Sun," also neglects to present the child in an idealistic light, presenting Jim Graham in a realistic way, in an unpleasant and uncomfortable situation, similar to how Huck is presented. However, the plot to, "Empire of the Sun," obviously differs, with Jim being a young child growing up in Shanghai, who is separated from his parents during the war and who must learn to survive, as Huck Finn must in Twain's novel, meeting obstacles and other characters along the way, before being reunited with his parents at the end. Like "Huckleberry Finn," this novel

reflects the attitudes of the surrounding society during its writing and publishing, towards children, but in this case, this society is situated amongst the modern and post-modern eras during the late 20th Century. During the modern period, there was a move away from narrative realism, however, this did not mean a move towards idealism, but simply focussed on the characters and their settings, which were sometimes obscure, but left the protagonist to reveal their inner feelings and thought in a complicated and questioning manner. Examples of modernism in literature include J. D. Salinger's, 'Catcher in the Rye,' published in 1951, which expresses teenage angst, confusion, sexuality and rebellion, in a naturalistic manner, becoming an icon for teenage angst and rebellion, and Harper Lee's, 'To Kill a Mockingbird,' which is written from the point of view of Scout, at a retrospective angle, as she recounts some of her childhood years, being intrigued by a local hermit and the trial of Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of rape. These naturalistic approaches to presenting children in literature are, in fact, more realistic in my opinion, although moving away from the bonds of the stereotypical realist narrator, because it gives a glimpse into the minds of the characters, in particular the protagonist, revealing feelings that would most likely be suppressed in an 'ideal,' society, in which the exploitation of children was being explored through literature. This, therefore presents the child in a realistic, thought-provoking light, rather than an idealistic one. The Contemporary and Post-Modern eras of literature also focussed on a subjectivism of the protagonist, turning from the external reality to examine the inner states of consciousness, for example in Toni Morrison's, 'The Bluest Eye,' which presents a little black girl who longs to be accepted by the white community surrounding her, <https://assignbuster.com/novels-of-childhood-the-question-of-idealization-in-twain-and-ballard/>

desiring blue eyes, a symbol of beauty to her. This idea of naturalism is also explored in Jeanette Winterson's, 'Oranges are not the Only Fruit,' published in 1985, which reveals the struggles of a young girl with lesbian tendencies within a strictly religious community. Combined with Misery literature, a title penned by booksellers to explain a genre of literature which focussed on autobiographical accounts of tortured childhoods, exploring themes such as child and substance abuse, some examples being, 'Angela's Ashes,' by Frank McCourt and, 'Wild Swans,' by Jung Chang, these genres of literature present a subverted view of the child in literature, not from an idealised point of view or in an idealised light, but from the realistic perspective of the "inner-space," giving a conscious image of the child's reality, rather than society's desired, idealistic view. And so, as Twain did in terms of the society he was writing within, however, not sharing the idea of authorial intrusion, Ballard chose to follow the ideas of his surrounding societal structures, revealing childhood through a dystopian view, dealing with the themes of violence, torture, war and death, as well as the need to survive, within his novel, which is definitely not a presentation of the child in an idealised light, but rather a reality one regarding Jim Graham's situation, however negative and harrowing it may be. Therefore, it cannot be said that novels about childhood are always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light.

Both "Huckleberry Finn," and "Empire of the Sun," are examples of Bildungsroman: coming-of-age novels that follow the protagonist in their journey from child to adult. Usually at the beginning of the story there is an emotional loss which makes the protagonist leave, and the main conflict is between the protagonist and society. In "Huckleberry Finn," we see Huck

develop from a naïve, young boy, playing tricks without thought for others and having to resolve the issues, revealing his lack of maturity, and racist views, pressed onto him by society, in the short monologue, ‘ It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger...’, to a more morally conscious being, resolving, ‘ Well, it made me sick to see it; and I was sorry for them poor pitiful rascals, it seemed like I couldn’t ever feel any hardness against them any more in the world,’ even though he is referring to two thieves, who have committed crimes. The sibilance of this phrase suggests a contrast between Huck’s newly-developing moral conscience and the sneaky, slippery nature of the thieves, almost as sly snakes among the people, to use an animal image. This shows his growing compassion and ability to forgive, particularly in his claim, ‘ It was a dreadful thing to see. Human beings can be awful cruel to one another,’ the cutting, alliterative ‘ c’ emphasising the cruel harshness of such an act, and Huck’s recognition of this. This development is a creative way to realistically portray the child in literature, moving away from the idealistic view that children already have a perfect moral conscience or suddenly develop one in an instant, without making any moral mistakes along the way. Likewise, we see the presentation of Jim Graham in, “ Empire of the Sun,” as a development: from a spoilt, naïve, almost selfish child, shown in his, ‘ delighted,’ tone, as he, ‘ mounted his cycle and rode through the formal, empty rooms,’ of his house, the adjective, ‘ empty,’ emphasising the loss of privilege in his life, a situation that is not ideal in the slightest, and figured, ‘ The war had brought him at least one small bonus,’ the monosyllabic nature and personification of which portrays Jim’s simple-mindedness and selfishness in thinking only of himself and his small

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victories, rather than the bigger picture, on to a young adolescent with a mature attitude and recognition of his parents' state after the war in, ' Jim had wanted to explain to his parents everything that he and the doctor had done together, but his mother and father had been through their own war,' and in his mature thinking upon his own growth, ' he felt saddened by the memory of all he had been through, and of how much he had changed.'

Therefore, through both novels we can clearly see that novels about childhood are not always guilty of presenting the child in an idealistic light.

In terms of form and structure, both " Huckleberry Finn," and " Empire of the Sun," are developed in a way which presents the child and childhood in a realistic, and therefore not idealistic light. To begin with, both novels are realist novels, with Twain being a pioneer of this form, whilst Ballard wrote during a time when this genre was already well-established. The Realist novel emerged as a reaction to sentimental fantasy writing, a characteristic of the Romantic movement. As both Twain and Ballard are writing as Realist novelists, it would be impossible for them to present children in an idealised light, as it would be in complete contrast to the writer's agendas: to expose society and present the harsh reality of childhood through the eyes or experiences of a child themselves. In fact, both writers have written novels which are influenced by their own childhoods, in order to meet their agenda in the most realistic and relevant way possible, through writing on experience, and not presenting children in an idealised light. Although Twain does not write from a completely autobiographical stance, it does feel somewhat as if " Huckleberry Finn," is writing his own autobiography, for example in the breaking of the third wall, with ' I never seen anybody but

lied...without it was Aunt Polly, she is- and Mary,' a recount of his original setting in his childhood, which explains the novel's original title, 'Huckleberry Finn's Autobiography.' However, some of Huck's experiences in the novel are directly linked to those of Twain as a child, for example, the death of his father in 1847, and of his brother Henry in a steamboat accident in 1858, devastated Twain, which may have influenced his use of death as a motif in the novel, for example in, 'I shot this fellow and took him into camp,' referring to young Huck's killing of the hog, during his elaborate scheme to frame his own murder, the familiar noun, 'fellow,' showing Huck's familiarity with death. Huck even describes everything as, 'dead quiet,' showing the deathly nature after his supposed death, a partial oxymoronic example of personification. Death is not an ideal state in life, or an ideal occurrence to be surrounded by, and so Twain's references to death allow us to reject the proposition that novels of childhood always present the child in an idealistic light. Whilst Twain's work is not auto-biographical, Ballard's takes it a step further in creating a semi-autobiographical novel, drawing on more immediate experiences from his childhood, to give a realistic, not idealistic perception of life as a child. Although some events are clearly fiction, there is a heavy influence of memory in Ballard's novel, for example, the geographical location and setting of Jim's home reflects where Ballard himself grew up, in Amherst Avenue in the Shanghai International Settlement, and experienced the war in a camp, like Jim Graham did, however not in separation from his parents, or at least not for long. In the same way that Twain was influenced by death, Ballard was devastated by the death of his wife Helen in 1964, after around eleven years of marriage and having three children together. This most likely influenced his constant

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references to death in “ Empire of the Sun,” like in the gruesome imagery, ‘ A burial tumulus rose from the wild sugar-cane at its centre, and the rotting coffins projected from the loose earth like a chest of drawers,’ a simplistic simile, which not only presents the common nature of death and exposure to it for Jim as a child, a very un-idealistic version of childhood, it being as common as a piece of furniture in Jim’s house, but also Jim’s childish expression of such death. This combined with the metaphor and hyperbole, ‘ In many ways these skeletons were more alive than the peasant-farmers who had briefly tenanted their bones,’ shows the prevalence of death in Jim’s life, so much so that he is almost de-sensitized to it, which is hardly an idealised state for a child. And so as both these novels concur, it can be said that novels about childhood, no matter when they were written or are set, do not always present the child in an idealised light.

The structure of both novels emphasises the realistic and naturalistic depiction of Huck and Jim Graham. These children are both placed in plausible situations, Huck in fleeing from society and his “ family” and Jim Graham, in contrast, suffering whilst separated from his family and finding surrogate father and mother figures for himself. Both characters also have realistic reactions, for example, Huck battles morally with himself, asking the naïve, but carefully thought-about, rhetorical question, ‘ What’s the use you learning to do right when it’s troublesome to do right and ain’t no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same?’ which also employs alliteration, to present his moral argument in terms of whether or not to turn Jim in or help him become free, and Jim Graham presents a childish viewpoint, expected of a scared, lonely child without guidance in, ‘ He was sure that she

would emerge from this dark cubby-hole like the Christmas fairy and tell him that the war was over,' which is a simile, the dainty image of the ' Christmas fairy,' contrasting and juxtaposing with the ' dark cubby-hole,' a description which creates an ominous tone. The plausible situations and purposeful, yet predictable reactions show the realistic reactions a child might have in these situations, not the idealised version, where they solve their problems and do the right thing from the beginning, on their own. Therefore, these examples support the view that novels about childhood are not always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light. Both novels are also episodic in nature, with Twain in particular choosing a picaresque structure, centred essentially around a likeable rogue and his exploits. (Huck) " Empire of the Sun," is also picaresque in nature to certain degree, but " Huckleberry Finn," is more so. The episodic nature of both novels, however, allows for a glimpse into many different aspects, focusses and experiences of the children's lives, including their inquisitive and unfocussed concentration on one event, as well as the important influence of a number of events in building a person of maturity, which is a far more realistic presentation of the child than one immediate or sudden transformation, or a child who present qualities of maturity from the start, which is an idealised presentation of the child. However, as Twain and Ballard both present a realistic rather than an idealistic picture of childhood, we can confidently say that novels about childhood are not always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light. This fact is especially proven true in that Twain, in choosing the picaresque structure could have very easily made his novel idyllic and idealised, but instead he chose not to, in effect making the raft on which Huck and Finn travel almost ideal in their situation, for example in the complacent, relaxed

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and comfortable mood in, ' we... let her [the raft] float wherever the current wanted her to; then we lit the pipes, and dangled our legs in the water, and talked about all kinds of things,' and in Huck's admission, ' Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft,' which employs the use of positive adjectives associated with the raft, whilst upholding the image of the shore as threatening through juxtaposition and through the association with danger and threat surrounding the shore, for example in the direct speech and imperative language of, ' The boys both jumped for the river-both of them hurt-and as they swum down the current, the men run along the bank shouting ' Kill them, kill them!'" which creates a threatening tone. This is an example of the raft-shore dichotomy. Therefore, we cannot say that novels about childhood are always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light, as Twain presents Huck amongst the threats and dangers of the area and time he lives in.

Both Twain and Ballard have carefully developed their characterisation in presenting their protagonists, who are Huck Finn and Jim Graham respectively, in order to portray the child in a realistic light, rather than an idealised one. Children were only introduced as protagonists in novels during the Victorian era, with Charlotte Bronte's, ' Jane Eyre,' being one of the first pioneers of this technique. Twain presents Huck as imperfect: an at times selfish young boy, who is a racially-prejudiced rogue sometimes, an image far from the ideal child. We see Huck's racist thinking in the racial slurs and derogatory tone of his language, ' And then think of ME! It would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom; and if I was ever

to see anybody from that town again I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame.' Whether or not this is his own thinking, or an example of the corrupt influence of society on the child, Twain presents Huck in a realistic light, rather than an idealistic light, as the ideal child would have rejected the prejudiced views of society themselves and shown love towards everyone without prompt. We also see his desire to rebel, in his negative tone towards, 'The Widow Douglas...[who], allowed she would sivilize,' him, which is a realistic presentation a child's attitude towards refinement and reform, and therefore we can further see that Huck is not presented in an idealised light. And so, we cannot say that novels about children are always guilty of presenting the child in an idealistic light, as Twain doesn't in this case, but instead presents Huck in a realistic light. In a similar respect to Twain, Ballard also presents Jim Graham as selfish, the same as Huck is presented, and egocentric. They are both seen to lie and manipulate people to their own advantage, which is not an image of the ideal child, but certainly a realistic one. The unpleasant side of Jim Graham is shown in his selfishness and greediness in his self-preservation when, 'he knew that he had been right to drink the first water himself,' the adverb, 'first,' showing his disregard for others, a realistic and non-idealistic presentation of the child. Therefore, we can see that in both, "Huckleberry Finn," and, "Empire of the Sun," the child is presented in a realistic, rather than an idealistic light, and so it cannot be said that novels about childhood, regardless of when they are written or set, are always guilty of presenting the child in an idealistic light.

"Huckleberry Finn," is written in the first person narrative, whilst "Empire of the Sun," is written in the third person narrative. However, both Twain's and

Ballard's choice of narrative viewpoint allows the child to be presented in a realistic, rather than an idealistic light, proving that novels about childhood are not always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light. Twain's use of the first person narrator allows us to hear not only what Huck says, but what he thinks, through the interior monologue, for example his moral crisis is depicted in, '...he WAS most free—and who was to blame for it? Why, ME. I couldn't get that out of my conscience, no how nor no way. It got to troubling me so I couldn't rest...' and in the personified dialogue, 'conscience up and says, every time, "But you knowed he was running for his freedom, and you could a paddled ashore and told somebody."' The reader can see that Huck is far from ideal as his moral conscience is not tuned to fairness and justice, but to society's views; views he would knowledgably consider and reject, not adhere to, if he were to be presented in an idealistic light. And so, Twain does not present Huckleberry Finn in an idealistic light, but rather a realistic one, revealing the naivety of a child's inner thoughts and moral decisions. On the other hand, although Ballard chooses to utilise Jim Graham as a third person narrator, the novel's events are portrayed from Jim's perspective, and we can still hear his thoughts, as we do Huck's, just not audibly. An example of this is Jim's hope, 'that his parents were safe and dead,' an ironic juxtaposition, and when, 'Once, without realising it, he had found himself eating the watery gruel. Jim had felt uneasy, and stared at his guilty hands.' The warped form of Jim's mind and the adjectives, 'uneasy,' and, 'guilty,' allow us to see Jim's moral conscience. This, along with Huck's moral battle, shows us that although both characters, as children, have a conscience, they often do not do the right thing in each situation, or think the right thing, which is a realistic presentation of children, and so hardly idealistic, as they

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become divorced from the idealised light through these presentations, particularly in our mind. Therefore, as we can see from these two examples, “Huckleberry Finn,” and, “Empire of the Sun,” novels about childhood are not always guilty of presenting the child in an idealistic light.

Both Twain and Ballard use a further range of language and styles to develop their presentation of the child in a realistic, rather than an idealistic light.

Twain’s use of a local dialect and colloquialisms, along with a lack of correct grammar and syntax, for example in, ‘You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, but that ain’t no matter,’ and in, ‘After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the ‘Bulrushers,’ do just that. This use of dialogue-like thoughts shows Huck’s lack of education, especially in being reluctant for others to, ‘sivilize,’ him, another example of childish use of incorrect spelling, and a concentration on how things seem and sound, rather than how they are or should be. This subverts the notion of the ideal child, as an idealistic presentation would depict a child with perfect grammar and speech, speaking ‘proper,’ English in an educated manner, with well-structured thoughts and a desire to learn. As a vague opposite of this is depicted, we can see clearly that Twain does not present Huck in an idealistic light, instead using dialogue which caused a lot of controversy at the time. The novel was banned in many libraries, particularly for its use of the racist slang slur, ‘nigger,’ a form of derogatory language. However, when used in this novel, Twain presents it in a realistic and satirical light, the tone of satire moving further away from the idealistic presentation of the child, as Huck uses such unpleasant language, conforming to society’s views

and attitudes towards African-American people, which is not the ideal image of a child. Therefore, through this we can also see that Huck Finn is not presented in an idealistic light by Twain, and so this proves that novels of childhood are not always guilty of presenting the child in an idealistic light.

Whilst Ballard opts for a more standard use of language unlike Twain, although it is racist in some ways, like Huck's language, such as in Jim's impolite revelation, 'The nine Chinese servants would be there, but in Jim's mind...they remained as passive and unseeing as the furniture,' a simile which shows his superior tone towards the Chinese, which juxtaposes against his view of the Japanese, and his falsely placed affiliation with them in, 'Jim had a deep respect for the Japanese,' he (Ballard) also uses disturbing imagery and apocalyptic symbolism in order to present the surrounding, harsh conditions for Jim, reflecting the *Misery* novel's style, in dealing with the contemporary fascination with tortured childhoods. Through both Jim's naïve affiliation with the Japanese and his slightly racist views of the Chinese, we can see a realistic depiction of the child, who places their trust, often, in the wrong people, as a child in the idealised world would not. Therefore, Ballard does not present Jim in an idealised light, but in a realistic one. His use of linguistic reference to the historical event of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki, in the falsely intriguing and deceptively positive yet ominous metaphor, 'this jewelled icon of a small exploding boy,' presents the threat of attack and destruction, the adjective, 'exploding,' emphasising its potential imminence in Jim's life, and his use of the swimming-pool and water motif, for example in, 'as the water drained from the swimming pools of the western suburbs,' which represents Jim's deteriorating mental and

physical state and capacity, along with the reference to flies, such as in chapter 36, which is entitled 'The Flies,' and in which gruesome and vivid imagery is used, like, 'The flies festered over the bodies...determined to hoard every morsel of flesh for the coming famine of peace,' an example of alliterative personification, and in which, 'a cloud of flies enveloped,' Jim, the verb, 'enveloped,' do present the over-ruling and suffocating nature of decay and death. This presents Jim's life in a realistic and unconceivably unpleasant way. The harsh and horrid conditions in which Jim lives and his deteriorating condition amongst the threats that he faces present the antithesis of the ideal life of a child, and so, like Twain, Ballard refrains from presenting his protagonist in an idealistic light. And so to say that novels of childhood, regardless of when they are written or set, are always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light, is blatantly incorrect, as both Ballard and Twain's novels have proven.

Children throughout literature have been presented in many different ways, some even in an idealised light, for example, in some cases during the Romantic period. However, there is much evidence to support the view that novels about children are not always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light, like the attitudes of the Victorian and Modern eras towards children, particularly in literature. The fact that neither Twain nor Ballard presented the child protagonist in their novels in an idealised light, but rather in a realistic one, also supports this view. Therefore, it is impossible to say that novels about childhood, regardless of when they are written or set, are always guilty of presenting the child in an idealised light, as the indications from across many literary periods, and the evidence from within

the two specific novels I have studied, "Huckleberry Finn," and "Empire of the Sun," suggest otherwise.