

THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHILD STAR

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

by
Jane Catherine O'Connor

School of Social Sciences and Law
Brunel University
February 2006

Abstract

This study provides a sociological account of the child star as both a universal and culturally specific phenomenon. Arguing against dominant ‘common-sense’ definitions of child stars as precociously deviant, I relocate the child star as a product of wider social contradictions and constructions surrounding children and childhood more generally.

Through an analysis of the way in which child stars are constructed in the textual media I demonstrate two central and competing discourses in relation to this group – one which focuses on their powerlessness due to their ‘abnormal’ status in relation to ‘normal’ children and the other which celebrates their power due to their ‘natural’ talents and redemptive qualities. These contradictory positions are identified through a consideration of the historical and mythological antecedents of today’s child stars as well as an analysis of the contemporary discourses which inform news stories about such individuals.

I argue that such ambiguity towards child stars can be identified as symptomatic of complex attitudes towards children in our society. The hostility which subjectifies child stars and generates powerlessness can be understood as emanating from the habitual association of performing children with precocious sexuality, the commercialisation of childhood and the fear that children are ‘growing up too quickly’. In contrast, the adoration of child stars which imbues them with the power to be reinvented with every new generation can be related to a more profound universal need to reify and admire a small number of ‘special’ children – a practice which is identifiable across the myths and folklore of the world (Jung 1959).

By identifying child stars as both powerless and powerful because of their difference to ‘normal’ children this study exposes how dominant constructions serve to demonise certain experiences of childhood and validate others, as well as highlighting the important role the child star plays in symbolising hope, innocence and futurity in our society.

Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Defining the Child Star	5
1.2 The Anomalous Child Star	8
1.3 Conclusion	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review	16
2.1 The Creation of the ‘Normal’ Child	17
2.1.1 <i>Developmental Psychology: The Definition of the ‘Normal’ Child</i>	20
2.1.2 <i>Social Constructivism</i>	25
2.2 Exceptional Children and Child Stars	30
2.2.1 <i>The Politics of Innocence</i>	37
2.2.2 <i>Media Representations of Children</i>	42
2.3 Conclusion	49
Chapter 3: A Social History of Child Stars	50
3.1 Early Child Actors	51
3.2 The Infant Phenomenon	54
3.3 American Vaudeville	61
3.4 The Hollywood Child Star Era	65
3.5 Child Stars on Television	72
3.6 Later Child Stars of the Cinema	76
3.7 Always Different, Always the Same	82
3.8 Conclusion	83
Chapter 4: Methodology	84
4.1 Background to the Present Study	84
4.2 A Dual Approach to Data Analysis	88
4.3 Discourse Analysis	90
4.3.1 <i>A Theoretical Background</i>	90
4.3.2 <i>Doing Discourse Analysis</i>	93
4.3.3 <i>Stages of Data Analysis</i>	96
4.4 Structural Analysis	104
4.4.1 <i>A Theoretical Background</i>	104
4.4.2 <i>A Structuralist Methodology</i>	109
4.5 Reflexivity and Validity	112
4.6 Conclusion	115

Chapter 5: Data Analysis I – The Powerlessness of Child Stars	117
5.1 The Construction of the Child Star as Damaged and Transgressive	118
5.1.1 <i>The Curse of the Child Star</i>	118
5.1.2 <i>Transgression and Punishment</i>	132
5.1.3 <i>The Child Star and the Boundaries of Childhood</i>	133
5.2 The Individual Response to Being Stigmatised as a Former Child Star	141
5.2.1 <i>Stigma and Social Identity</i>	143
5.2.2 <i>Spoiled or Spoilt? Group Alignment and Ego Identity</i>	147
5.3 Conclusion	156
Chapter 6: Data Analysis II – The Power of Child Stars	160
6.1 ‘Bigger than Big and Smaller than Small’: The Child Archetype and the Child Star	162
6.1.1 <i>The History of the Wonder-Child</i>	163
6.1.2 <i>Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious</i>	166
6.1.3 <i>The Christ-like Child Star</i>	168
6.1.4 <i>The Sacred Smallness of the Child</i>	174
6.1.5 <i>The Cult of Naturalness</i>	177
6.1.6 <i>The Relevance of the ‘Child’ Motif in Contemporary Western Society</i>	180
6.2 The Power of Taboo	181
6.3 The Power of Stories: Charlotte Church	187
6.3.1 <i>The Celebration</i>	190
6.3.2 <i>The Transformation</i>	195
6.3.3 <i>The Disintegration</i>	199
6.3.4 <i>The Alienation</i>	201
6.3.5 <i>The Return</i>	204
6.4 Conclusion	210
Chapter 7: Conclusion	213
7.1 Summary of Findings	213
7.2 Childhood and the Child Star	218
7.3 Appraisal of Methodology and Validity of Study	229
7.4 Potential Future Research	233
7.5 Conclusion	235
Appendix I: Images of Child Stars	237
Bibliography	246

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Chris Jenks for his encouragement and support throughout this project and for being such an inspirational supervisor.

I would also like to thank Dany Nobus for his valuable feedback and advice.

I dedicate this work to my mum and dad.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In contemporary Western culture the term child star has become synonymous with a particularly deviant type of childhood. Images of precocious young performers, monstrous stage parents, 'lost' childhoods and disastrous adult lives have all become part of the way child stars are commonly perceived thus often rendering them objects of pity, ridicule and disdain.

Popular accounts of child stardom to date have focussed on the supposed detrimental psychological effects of early success in show business and the dysfunctional parent/child relations which allow such children to become commodities. The idea that it is parents projecting their unrealised hopes and dreams onto their off-spring which creates the impetus for children to be pushed into the limelight is a common perception of the dynamic behind child stardom, as is the idea of such children as being ruined by the experience. In essence the story about child stars so far has been one of vulnerable children being exploited by their parents and the fickle world of entertainment, and then suffering psychological breakdowns most commonly in the form of drug and alcohol addiction and eating disorders. This construction of the child star as a tragic figure was most famously embodied in the 1960s film *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) which starred Bette Davis as a grotesque ageing one-time child performer, still dressed in baby doll clothes trapped both by her past and her sadomasochistic sister. This image of former child stars as figures of parody and derision continues to be reinforced in Western culture by various means. For example, the media sensationalise 'child star gone bad' stories and former child stars appear on chat shows and television programmes recounting tales of woe in what has been described as 'the has-been-circuit' (Bonaduce 1991).

Characterised by phrases such as 'too much too young' and 'scarred by success', newspaper feature articles, obituaries and interviews also work to reinforce this negative stereotype whenever a former child star dies, tries to make a come-back or gets cast in a major film role. The message is loud and clear; the responsible parent does not even consider allowing their child to become a professional performer. Within this largely

middle-class discourse then, being a 'proper' parent involves protecting your child from the entertainment industry and being a 'proper' child involves not performing for money:

The horror stories of young actors whose childhoods end in parental estrangement, drug addiction or suicide are enough to terrify any sensible parent into giving stage and screen a wide berth. (The Guardian 22.11.00)

These 'horror stories' have become part of the popular imagination, a litany of failure of promising youngsters whose demises are recounted, embellished and exaggerated over and over again to the morbid fascination of readers, listeners or viewers. They are the tales of 'America's least wanted' as Ryan (2000) describes former child TV stars, forever hapless, inadequate individuals, children who have lost their only saving grace – their cute appeal, in a less than friendly adult world.

Some stories have become almost legendary, their victims eliciting as little, if not less, real compassion as the misadventures of one of their screen characters might; Judy Garland's pill popping ruin at the hands of MGM, Margaret O'Brien being told her pet dog had just died to ensure she cried on cue, Macaulay Culkin throwing \$20 bills out the window to try and entice new friends, Drew Barrymore firmly on the party scene and smoking dope at age nine, Jackie Coogan suing his mother for his fortunes as an adult, River Phoenix collapsing and dying of a drug overdose outside a New York nightclub, the entire cast of *Diff'rent Strokes* being arrested for various misdemeanours and one of them dying of an overdose, Lena Zavaroni starving herself to death in a desperate attempt not to grow up. The list goes on and on and is a sorry account of adult betrayal, false hopes, exploitation and excess. Such individuals are often referred to as 'lost' in adult life, for example; 'Little Girl Lost' was the title of an interview with a 34 year old Bonnie Langford (The Guardian 06.03.00), only to be 'found' when dead, such as in the obituary of Anissa Jones; 'Child TV Star Found Dead' (New York Daily News 1976) suggesting a lifetime in a wilderness of failure and rejection, with public recognition now only possible because of a tragic death.

It is interesting how the audience is never implicated in such accounts of failure and rejection, and nor is the wider culture which demands child stars as a media product and

then writes them off as they grow up and away from their endearing childhood selves. By centring accounts of child stardom on the individual pathology of the young performers and the adults who are supposed to be looking after them it has become accepted that child stardom is a kind of deviance which activates the worst characteristics of children (precociousness and arrogance), and their parents (greed and ruthlessness). That the trajectory for all child performers is one of disaster and regret has also become a standard expectation for child stars, even given some research which suggests that the majority of such individuals go on to live happy and productive adult lives.¹

This study aims to both challenge the narrow view which such reductive psychological accounts of child stardom provide by investigating the social nature of the child star and also to question why child stars have traditionally been conceptualised in such a negative way. In order to do this I will be examining the way in which the category 'child star' is constructed by the media and will consider the symbolic value of child stars as a culturally significant phenomenon. I wish to relocate the child star as emblematic of our fraught relationship with children at the beginning of the twenty first century whereby we both romanticise the image of the child and yet fear what they are going to grow into. By conceptualising child stars as both a product of the entertainment industry and a manifestation of the universal desire to see 'special' children reified and adored I intend to demonstrate the complex nature of the child star as a social category which is informed by influences as diverse as mythology, the media, the economy, sexual politics and social policy.

I aim to show that, far from being an example of individual deviance the child star is in fact a manifestation of much wider cultural contradictions surrounding childhood. Indeed, I will argue that the way child stars are demanded and constructed in our culture is symptomatic of the complex status of the 'child' in contemporary society who is defined as being different in all ways to the adult whilst being persistently commodified, sexualised and thus 'adultified' in the media. Cute they may be, but the idea of a child who has become a

¹ A 1998 Wayne State University survey of former child stars found that three-quarters of the participants felt they led 'normal' lives with 'normal' relationships with their parents. (Rapport 1999)

commodity does not sit happily with accepted standards of childhood experience in our culture.

The child star therefore has to be understood in relation to the way in which children today are bound and regulated by shared normative ideals about appropriate activities, behaviour and appearances which work to homogenise and control childhood. As Rose notes:

The modern child has become the focus of innumerable projects that purport to safeguard it from physical, sexual or moral danger, to ensure its 'normal' development, to actively promote certain capacities or attributes such as intelligence, educability and emotional stability. (Rose 1989:121)

Within this protectionist and aspirational concept of childhood, the 'child' functions as an index of civilisation and modernity with those who fall outside the normative definitions being pathologised and subject to the regulating authority of institutional holders of power. For instance, the child who is not deemed to behave 'properly' at school is subject to the dictates of medicine and educational psychology which seek to return the child to normative standards of behaviour through the administration of drugs or therapeutic intervention. The media too work to demonise certain versions of childhood which threaten the social order - the frequent tabloid denigration of 'wayward' teenage parents who live on benefits for example bears testament to this, as does the construction of traveller children as deviant. In this sense then the 'child' has come to be one of a select group of persons and phenomena which symbolise:

a range of social anxieties concerning threats to the established order and traditional values, the decline of morality and social discipline, and the need to take firm steps in order to prevent a downward spiral into disorder. (Rose 1989:123)

This concept of the child as symbolic of something more than itself is a key theme of this study which investigates the cultural significance of one tiny sub-section of childhood, namely, child stars. Through such an investigation I intend to demonstrate the usefulness of exploring the status of the child star in illuminating the contradictory status of all children in our society who are both powerful symbols of hope and futurity and largely

powerless subjects of adult manipulation. In this sense child stars, although viewed as very different to ‘normal’ children, are also an extreme embodiment of the ‘child’ as a conceptual entity. Thus processes of reification and subjectification which are identified in relation to child stars can be understood as micro examples of macro processes which work to subjectify all children but which are generally more obscure and diluted than they are in the case of the publicly accessible child star.

The child star then is used in this study as an analytic tool with which to examine some of the tensions and power struggles which are inherent in our current construction of childhood, as well as being the subject of investigation as a distinct social category.

First, however, it is necessary to define more specifically what I mean by the term child star and, as such, set the boundaries of the subject of this research.

1.1 Defining the Child Star

The term child star is commonly understood to have been invented to describe the young performers in Hollywood films of the 1920s and 30s such as Shirley Temple, Judy Garland and Jackie Coogan. Such stars provided the prototypes for subsequent child actors and singers although, as will become evident in the social history chapter, the figure of the special performing child has a legacy which reaches far beyond this time and continues to the present day. Therefore, in this study ‘child star’ is conceptualised as a much wider category than the narrow Hollywood definition would allow in order to encompass children who have found success in the entertainment world before and since the so-called ‘Child Star Era’ and also to include children who have become famous through singing as well as acting.

Although the definition of child star should logically involve a neat definition of ‘child’ paired up with a neat definition of ‘star’ to create a clear and unambiguous new category, as anyone who has tried to define either will testify, no such straightforward simplicity is possible. Definitions of the child are, of course, culturally specific as are delineations as to when childhood ends and what kinds of activities and experiences are considered

appropriate for those in the early stage of life. I explore the historical antecedents of the dominant Western version of childhood in the Literature Review, but for the purpose of this definition it is sufficient to say that the 'child' is understood as a person under sixteen years of age, although most child stars are in fact under twelve. The incongruity of the child star with normalised definitions of the child and childhood as they are constructed in our society is a central theme of the study and therefore, the child stars investigated in this research all emanate from Western culture.²

As well as being a special kind of child, the child star is also, of course, a particular kind of star. Definitions of what a star is are nearly as slippery as definitions of what a child is due to the fact that the star is both a symbol and a commodity as well as a human being. Ellis (1982) describes a star in purely functional terms as:

a performer in a particular medium, whose figure enters into subsidiary forms of circulation and then feeds back into future performances. (Ellis quoted in Cook 1985:51)

and views stars as primarily a marketing device and an 'invitation to cinema' highlighting how their appeal is diffused through media reporting which:

plays upon the central paradox of stardom: that stars are both ordinary and glamorous, both like us and unlike us, both a person and a commodity, both real and mythical, both public and intimate. (ibid:52)

However, in his definition, Friedberg (1982) focuses on the semiotic value of the star which allows the audience to enter the fantasy of film narratives:

The film star is...a particular commoditised human, routed through a system of signs with exchange value....the star image carries powerful cultural connotations which both exceed the fictional codes of character and identification and work to bind us into the fictional world of the film. (Friedberg quoted in Cook 1985:50)

² Due to the limitations of this project it was not possible to take child actors and performers from all over the world into consideration as a full understanding of the way in which childhood is constructed in each culture would be required as well as a familiarity with the languages and semiotic codes which inform the media communications of each country.

In relation to classic Hollywood child stars such as Shirley Temple, Mickey Rooney and Freddie Bartholomew, it will be demonstrated in a later chapter how their definition as stars was due to the same process of establishing their 'star quality' and charisma which propelled adult stars such as Clark Gable and Rita Hayward to popular success. However, as this study will make clear, Hollywood's child stars also had another element of appeal, namely their power to symbolise all of the 'good' attributes of childhood such as innocence and natural wisdom. In this sense the child star of stage and screen coincided with and was informed by the child star of mythical adventure, thereby elevating the child star to a separate realm of existence from its adult star counterparts. It is this construction of the child star as an entity above and beyond both 'normal' childhood and generalised definitions of stardom which render child stars such a unique group to investigate.

The fact that the term child star has been appropriated from its original commercial usage to denote children who were part of the Hollywood star system of the early twentieth century and has since become a common phrase to describe any and all children who achieve even a modicum of success in the entertainment world serves to complicate the definition further. For the purposes of this study then a tautological definition applies, whereby a child star is anyone who is described as such in the media (as long as their achievements are in the popular performing arts). Although such a circuitous definition appears at first insubstantial it serves to highlight the arbitrary constructed nature of the child star and the way in which the term has come to be associated with a certain negative stereotype of the precocious, over-confident brat with pushy parents and a disastrous future ahead of them – an image created and reinforced by the media for reasons which will be explored in later chapters.

Finally, I wish to differentiate the child stars in this study from early achievers in other fields of endeavour. The term 'child star' has become an increasingly popular short-hand way for the press to describe any and all children who do particularly well at something thus losing some of its unique correlation with stars who perform on the stage or screen. Although 'child star' is still primarily associated with young actors and singers then we also have young tennis players, chess champions, pianists, footballers and mathematicians

being described as ‘stars’. However, interesting though investigations into such individuals would be, this study does not include these children in the central analysis although they do pop up from time to time in discussion over the nature of genius or the definitions of ‘normality’ in relation to childhood. This study is about child stars of the stage and screen and the significance that their very presence and the way they are categorised and conceptualised has in our culture.

Therefore, I use the term ‘child star’ in two different ways in this study. The first is used when describing a juvenile individual who acted or sang in a primary role in a stage or screen production. It is purely a descriptive term and is alternated with terms such as ‘young performer’ and ‘child actor’. A child star then is a young actor or singer who has achieved some degree of fame and recognition and who is paid for his or her professional services.

The other use of the term refers to the category of child star as distinct from the material experience of any one performer and denotes the socially constructed nature of the phenomenon.

The child star is also, of course, a temporary rather than a fixed, social category despite the lifelong repercussions such a label often brings. Therefore, the collective term ‘child stars’ is often used in this study in a manner which necessarily disregards temporal conventions to refer to a social group connected only by their extraordinary childhood experiences as they have passed through their child stardom at varying historical moments.

1.2 The Anomalous Child Star

One of the main reasons why child stars are a particularly interesting group to investigate is their apparently anomalous status in relation to accepted, dominant tenets of contemporary Western childhood. Indeed, the question of how the child star has managed to continue to find a niche in our popular culture, given the protectionist attitude towards children which has characterised social and educational policy in the West in the last hundred years, is an intriguing one.

For example, the message about child labour is unequivocal in societies such as ours and states that children should not work, that it is morally, physically and emotionally damaging for them to do so and that adults who do allow or encourage their children to undertake paid employment are unfit parents. The proper place for today's child is generally accepted to be in the classroom being instructed or at home being cared for and the law in the UK upholds this view. Dictates on child employment state that children and young people can only work in a limited number of jobs and for a specified time until they reach the minimum school leaving date. For example children of thirteen and fourteen may only be employed in light work, for up to five hours on any day on which they are not expected to attend school, up to a maximum of twenty-five hours each week, not including Sundays and all children must also now obtain permits to work from the education and leisure services of their borough which is signed by employers and parents.

Although children who work in the entertainment industry are also subject to exacting rules and regulations intended to safeguard their well-being³ they are still regarded as a separate case from 'ordinary' children. For example, the entertainment industry is the only industry which is allowed to employ children under twelve and for which children are allowed to miss up to eighty days a year of their regular education as long as they have three hours of daily tutoring on set. There also seems to be evidence of a somewhat lackadaisical attitude towards regulations over the hours young performers work due to the huge financial and time pressures which surround most productions. This commonplace 'rule-bending' is recalled in the following quote from a former child actor:

I can't remember being taken off the set because they'd gone over hours. I think a lot of chaperones are quite liberal. I remember being on set till 2 o'clock in the morning, with 6 o'clock starts. (Quoted in Singleton-Turner 1999:50)

Unsurprisingly, in an adults' world, adults' rules apply.

³ For example children under 5 may work for a maximum of 30 minutes and may be at the place of performance or rehearsal for only 2 hours, those hours being between 9.30am and 4.30pm (Source Singleton-Turner 1999:44)

Those who attend stage schools are also treated differently from 'normal' children as a large part of the educational day is spent practising performance skills such as singing and dancing rather than the literacy and numeracy which most schools focus on. That success for such children is more aligned to getting auditions and winning parts than achieving academically is a common perception which no doubt stage school owners would dispute.

The young performer is also separated from 'normal' children in other more subtle ways. For example, in general children are no longer expected to contribute to their family's income in Western society and yet it is accepted that children who find success working in the entertainment industry will raise their family's standard of living through their economic activity. Furthermore, the vast majority of children are not encouraged or expected to start their careers when still receiving their formal education and children on the whole are expected to be 'natural' and unaffected and are not required to maintain and manage a professional persona.

Against the background of our current dominant definitions of what childhood should and should not entail then, the experience of the child star begins to stand out like a beacon as utterly incongruous with the innocent and protected space in which all other children are supposed to be growing up. The child star is, to all intents and purposes, an anachronism of an earlier time when the welfare of the child was not a priority and childhood as a special period of education and security was not seen as the right of all children. So why are child stars still demanded and still appearing? Presumably they are fulfilling some need, be it social, cultural or psychological, which is not met either by children in general or by adult performers.

Therefore, the first question to be addressed in this research is '**Why do we have child stars?**' What role do they play in our culture which cannot be satisfactorily filled by other means given the apparently treacherous experiences of those who have found fame early in life and our dedication as a society to protecting children from all possible danger and from the commercial adult world in general?

The second question relates to the way in which stories about famous child performers seem to be framed in the media in order to present an overwhelmingly negative image of the child star and the former child star. This also appears anomalous with our general encouragement and support of children who try hard and achieve something special. The pat on the back when little Tommy comes first in a race turns into a sneer when little Tommy lands the lead role in a movie. This sentiment, when naturalised through the print media, becomes a powerful tool in creating a stigma around the child star and former child star which can blight the individual's life and career until the very end. Indeed, as one haunted former child star puts it:

The words 'child star' will be on my gravestone.⁴

The question to be asked then is **'Why are child stars and former child stars frequently ridiculed and denigrated in the media?'** I will explore the possibility that this question is particularly salient because it relates to issues of management and manipulation of children and of the category 'childhood' which resonate beyond the world of the child star and into every aspect of children's lives and experiences in our society. By examining the way in which shared definitions of a 'normal' child have been socially constructed over the last two centuries in the literature review it will hopefully become clear that certain strategies of control are employed by the media in order to maintain the status quo, to reinforce certain collective values concerning childhood and to 'keep children in their place'. Furthermore, due to their location outside of mainstream ideas and practices around raising children, I consider child stars to be a minority group in our society. Therefore, by investigating the ways in which they are marginalised and stigmatised by the media, wider processes of insidious and overt techniques of discrimination may be identified which relate to other groups which fall outside the 'norm'

The following section outlines what will be included in the proceeding chapters and how the central questions of the research will be addressed.

⁴ Benedictus Leo quoted in The Guardian Friday Review 28.05.04

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The literature review examines the historical antecedents to the creation of the notion of the ‘normal’ child in Western culture and highlights the arbitrary nature of such a definition. The social constructivist approach to studying childhood, emanating from Philippe Ariès’(1962) seminal work, is evaluated in terms of explaining the invention of the ‘child’ as a cultural category. Having established the dominance of a shared social definition of childhood, the child star is shown to be ‘abnormal’ or deviant and therefore a challenge to the ideal category of ‘child’. Research about other groups of children who fall outside the dominant definition of the ideal child because they are exceptional in some way is considered in an attempt to place the child star in a social context. However, it becomes clear that even though they share a degree of common ground with other disenfranchised children, child stars inhabit a unique category due to their association with precocious sexuality and eroticised innocence – controversial elements which are often evident in their on-screen representations . The paucity of academic research in the area of child stars is noted and the significant gap this leaves in understanding the current status of childhood in our media saturated culture is identified.

Chapter 3. A Social History of Child Stars

This chapter aims to contextualise our current construction of the child star as a result of social, political, economic and artistic influences over the last two hundred years and beyond. The history of the performing child will be described in reference to changing ideas about childhood and shifting cultural forms as the child star moved from street to stage to screen over the twentieth century. The way in which child stars have always been subject to adult control and manipulation and have come to be symbolic of wider issues and fears about the moral order of society will be explored and thus the child star as an enduring figure of cultural significance will be established.

Chapter 4. Methodology

In order to explore the status of child stars in our society it was decided that a method of analysing cultural documents pertaining to the group in question was appropriate. Given the multitude of stories and articles about child stars in newspapers and magazines it seemed a particularly useful source of secondary data that would not only provide a tellability index as to the status of child stars now, but which could be compared and contrasted to articles from earlier publications allowing an element of historical analysis as well.

The analysis is divided into two sections. The first approaches the data using the techniques of discourse analysis as defined by Wetherell and Potter (1987, 1992) and works from the assumption that meaning is created through text. Due to the way in which stories about child stars are almost overwhelmingly denigrating, and also due to the lifelong stigma that many former child stars report feeling about their early success, this section of the analysis focuses on the powerlessness of child stars to control the social definitions created for them in the wider culture. This powerlessness is related to the powerlessness of children more generally who are bounded and subjectified by cultural and social forces.

The second stage of the analysis approaches the same body of data from a broadly structuralist perspective in order to gain a wider understanding of why the child star occupies such a significant position in our cultural landscape, given the challenge such individuals present to our dominant definition of childhood. Using ideas from Kerenyi and Jung (1969), Leach (1963) and Propp (1969) the timeless appeal and power of the child star to elicit emotion and provide hope for the future is explored. This power of the child star is also related to the power of all children to impact on adult sensibilities.

The two qualitative approaches employed to investigate the sociological status of the child star as described above each form the basis of one of the data analysis chapters which follow. By designing a dual Methodology in order to investigate both the power and the powerlessness of the child star the aim is to encompass as much of the complexity of the

category as possible, whilst still focussing the research on the specific characteristics of the child star.

Chapter 5. Data Analysis I – The Powerlessness of Child Stars

This chapter of the analysis examines the way in which ‘child star’ as a social construction works to both subjectify the members of that group and to reinforce collective normative standards about children and childhood. Concepts of transgression and stigma in relation to the child star are identified and techniques of dealing with what Goffman (1990) terms a ‘spoiled identity’ are considered.

Chapter 6. Data Analysis II – The Power of Child Stars

Drawing on the work of Carl Jung on archetypes and the unconscious, the idea that the child star is a modern day expression of the ‘wonder-child’ motif is explored and connections between ancient examples of that archetype, such as the Christ child, and modern day representations and descriptions of child stars are made. The way in which narratives about child stars follow certain mythological and fairy-tale like conventions is identified through a case study of stories about Charlotte Church, and certain universal themes and features are highlighted which suggest the significance of the child star may go far beyond its current culturally specific construction.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

The conclusion brings together the strands of analysis in the preceding chapters and considers the findings of the research in relation to the initial questions posed in the introduction.

The argument will be made that in order to understand the current complex status of child stars in Western culture it is important to go beyond a purely social constructivist approach to researching childhood, and to draw on wider ideas pertaining to the universality of certain themes and motifs which continue to shape and inform our representations of

children. The ramifications of the research findings in relation to wider contemporary issues surrounding childhood will be outlined and the techniques of media subjectification which work to stigmatise child stars will be identified as relevant to future studies of other 'transgressive' children as well as minority social groups in general. The cultural significance of the child star will be highlighted and the sociological value of researching this unique group will be reiterated. Finally, suggestions will be made as to potential further research in this area.

1.3 Conclusion

The overriding aims of this study are therefore twofold:

- to provide a substantive, sociological account of the child star as it is constructed in Western culture which goes beyond a purely social constructivist reading by encompassing mythological and structuralist elements of analysis.
- to contribute to the current debate on the complex status of Western childhood by highlighting the contradictory demands we make on children to be both symbolically powerful and socially deferent.

The following chapter reviews literature pertaining to the social construction of a particular brand of 'normality' in relation to Western childhood and locates the child star as occupying a position outside the conceptual boundaries of the category.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the next chapter on the Social History of Child Stars I will demonstrate the malleability and tenacity of this unique band of children to be reinvented for every new phase of cultural production and to provide entertainment in whatever form is required of them by the adults who define and desire them. For such a colourful and curious troupe however, a surprising lack of academic research into their status and cultural significance has been undertaken due in a large part, I would imagine, to the inherent difficulty of conceptualising such a disparate and temporally disjointed set of individuals as a distinct social group. Although as will be seen later in this chapter, there has been much reporting of the individual lives and experiences of such performers and also much textual analysis of film and television roles played by child actors, the consideration of the child star as a social category existing beyond the experiences of individual children has not been directly addressed. However, in order to provide a theoretical background for the rest of this study, it is important to establish the child star as a sociological and cultural construct as well as a way of describing individual juvenile performers. To this end the following review brings together several strands of research all of which have a bearing on how the category 'child star' is defined and conceptualised in our culture.

The first section of the review deals chronologically with literature which relates theoretically to the study of children and childhood referring to work by writers such as Mead (1936), Ariès (1962), Jenks (1996), Cunningham (1995) and James and Prout (1990). There will be specific emphasis on the origin and naturalisation of the modern, Western concept of the 'normal' child and on the ways in which contemporary theorists have attempted to synthesise approaches to childhood studies in order to facilitate a shared understanding of the category 'child'. The aim of this section is to demonstrate both the arbitrary nature of our definition of the 'normal' child and to highlight the fears and concerns which surround those children who challenge such a definition, of which child stars are one example.

Having established that the category 'child star' derives meaning through the difference of its members to 'normal' children, I go on in Section 2.2 to explore the nature of this

difference in reference to writing by and about children involved in the entertainment industry and in relation to empirical studies of other groups of extraordinary children such as child prodigies and geniuses. The work of Higonnet (1998) and Kincaid (1992) on the eroticised innocence of images of childhood will then be discussed in reference to the subversive association of child stars with precocious sexuality and paedophilia – a synergy which further complicates the status of this group. Finally, research into media representations of children on screen will be presented as evidence of the child star's central role in reinforcing and embodying certain idealised versions of childhood.

Through the inclusion of literature relating to issues such as the homogenisation of childhood, the social definition of extraordinary children and the politics of innocence surrounding the image of the child, it is intended that this review will show that the child star is a category which connects a diverse range of research in childhood studies and which can be used to investigate wider cultural processes which work to contain and exploit children and childhood more generally. Indeed, it is hoped that the proceeding analysis chapters reflect the usefulness of the child star as a focus for understanding the ambiguous status of childhood in our media saturated society, as well going some way towards rectifying the paucity of research on this specific group of children.

The following section then reviews literature relating to the idea of the 'normal' child in Western society, a social construct which has been unquantifiably powerful in dictating how contemporary childhood is defined and what we expect children to be and do in our culture - both on and off screen.

2.1 The Creation of the 'Normal' Child

Although the idea of studying childhood as a valid and important time of life is generally attributed to the surge in interest in this area following Ariès' (1962) seminal work relating to the 'invention of childhood' in Europe after the Middle Ages, it will be argued here that the actual roots of our theoretical approach to childhood emanate from anthropological studies from the 1920s and 30s.

For example, Ruth Benedict's (1938) comparative study of child rearing in Native American and European communities identified the concept of continuities and discontinuities in cultural conditioning. Rather than simply observing differences in socialisation techniques, Benedict explored the fundamental differences in how children were conceptualised and the impact that expectations of their skills and abilities had on their behaviour. She found that the 'dominance-submission' power relation of adult/child interaction which is so entrenched and naturalised in Western culture was alien to many Native American communities who were 'especially explicit in rejecting the idea of a child's submissive or obedient behaviour' (Benedict 1938:25). As such communities believed that the attitudes and behaviours in childhood set the pattern for the adult self and that docile obedience was not a desirable characteristic for adults, Benedict explains how independence and responsibility in young children can be encouraged so that the childhood self is on a continuum to the adult self and not sharply demarcated from it as it is in Western cultures. To illustrate this point she gives the following example of an observed incident while sitting with a group of Papago elders in Arizona:

The man of the house turned to his little three year-old granddaughter and asked her to close the door. The door was heavy and hard to shut. The child tried, but it did not move. Several times the grandfather repeated, 'Yes, close the door.' No-one jumped to the child's assistance. No one took the responsibility away from her...It was assumed that the task would not be asked of her unless she could perform it, and, having been asked, the responsibility was hers alone just as if she were a grown woman. (Benedict 1938:23)

When compared to the discontinuity in conditioning as is the norm in Western culture, it becomes apparent that Western childhood is built on a different set of presumptions, beliefs and ideals. The fact that our concept of a child is of a being who is submissive to adult authority, non responsible and an economically non-contributing member of the family doesn't necessarily mean the child embodies these characteristics, but that they are projected onto him or her by the social world in which they live. In fact, working as a psychiatrist, Benedict went so far as to suggest that the discontinuity between childhood and adulthood could lead to severe mental distress in adulthood when behaviour which

used to please others becomes inappropriate and irritating or at least could explain the turbulence of adolescence:

The adolescent period of *Sturm und Drang* with which we are so familiar becomes intelligible in terms of our discontinuous cultural institutions and dogmas rather than in terms of physiological necessity. (Benedict 1938:29)

Working at the same time Margaret Mead was studying children and childhood in Bali. She noted that in Bali, children were called 'small human beings' and that the whole of life was seen 'as a circular stage on which human beings, born small, as they grow taller, heavier, more skilled, play predetermined roles, unchanging in their main outlines, endlessly various and subject to improvisation in detail' (Mead 1936:40). In contrast to the Western conception of the life cycle as sequential and consisting of a series of defined stages related to various ages, it was clear that the experience of childhood in various cultures was fundamentally different and that such differences could be observed, recorded and understood within the framework of research procedures which were acceptable at that time.

In light of such early anthropological research, Ariès' assertion that Western childhood as a separate protected space was a cultural invention seems somewhat less startling and more a logical next step from previous comparative studies such as the ones mentioned above.

Such early studies were already challenging the idea of childhood as a universal, homogenous experience for young human beings and yet because such findings were competing with the rising field of psychological research into child development (eg Piaget 1932, Gesell 1925, Burt 1935) and because they were incompatible with such rigid, 'scientific' definitions of the 'normal' child, they became somewhat peripheral to central debates about childhood for the next few decades. The idea that there was certainly nothing fundamentally 'normal' or 'natural' about all children was firmly off the agenda as the psycho-medical model of the child dominated literature throughout the 1940s and 50s. However, the discontinuity of Western childhood from adulthood as identified by such anthropologists as Benedict and Mead, and the cultural rather than biological basis of this

separation is a recurring and important theme in the Sociology of Childhood and was picked up again by the social constructivists in the 1980s.

2.1.1 Developmental Psychology – The Definition of the ‘Normal’ Child

The pre-cursor to developmental psychology proper was intelligence testing which was first proposed by Galton in ‘Hereditary Genius’ (1867) and was subsequently developed in the UK by Spearman (1904, 1915) and Burt (1935) and in the USA by Cattell (1936) and Eysenck (1953).

The potential dangers of such invasive psychological testing became clear when the arbitrary association of intelligence with virtue (or lack of it) was used to justify sterilization programmes in the USA between 1900 and 1930, during which time more than 8000 people were sterilised for activities as diverse as chicken stealing and car theft as well as for prostitution. H.H. Goddard, a member of the Eugenics movement in America at that time, and a respected educationalist, ensured that the Binet-Simon test (1908) was widely used throughout schools to identify the feeble-minded and went on to publish *The Kallikak Family* (below) which clearly presented the dangers of the ‘feeble-minded’ reproducing themselves and served to reinforce stereotypical ideas about certain children being born ‘bad’ thus justifying their treatment as subhuman or at least as inferior members of society:

MARTIN KALLIKAK

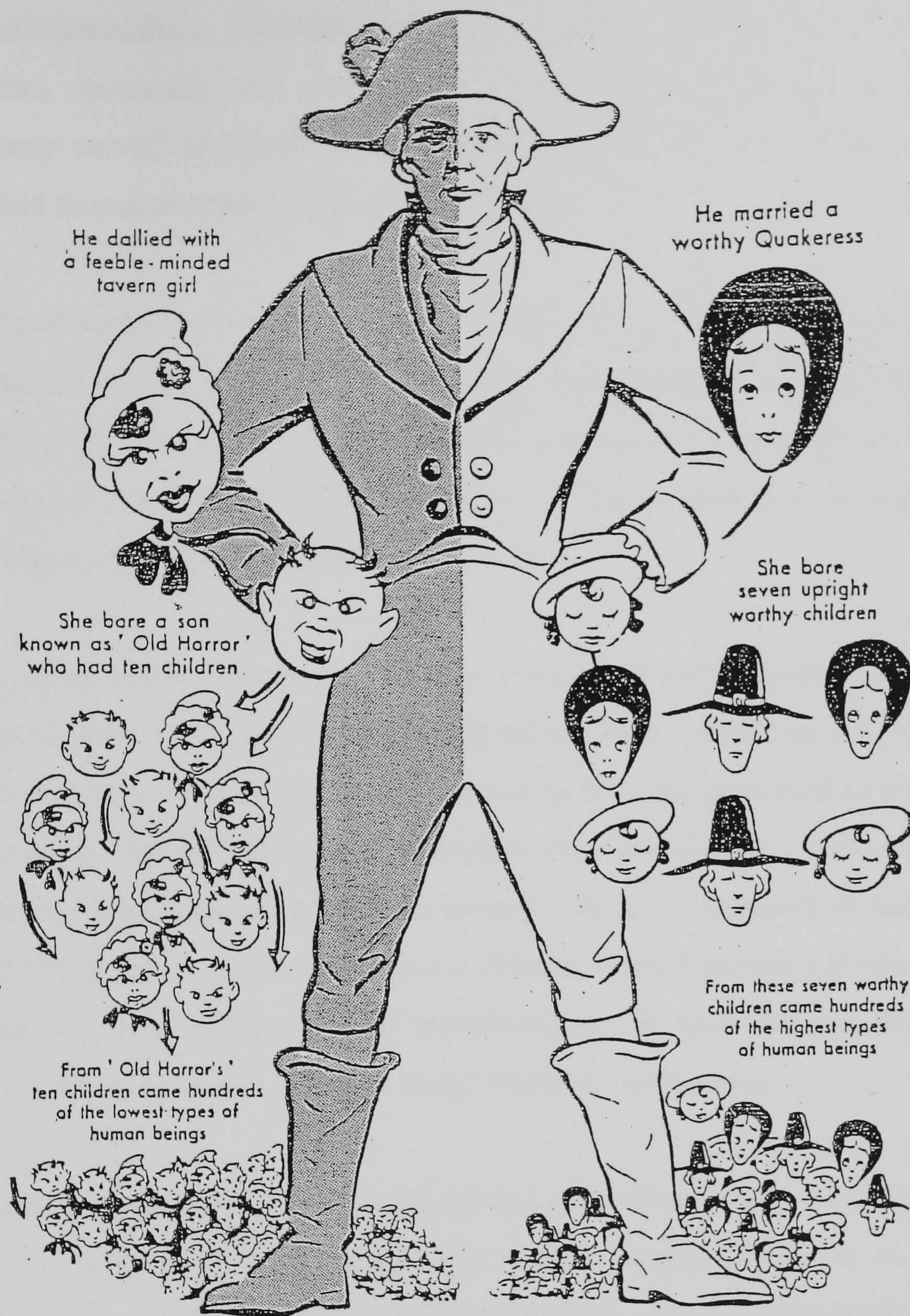


Fig 1 – The influence of heredity is illustrated by the 'good' and 'bad' Kallikaks in Garrett (1955)

The idea that intelligence could and should be used to determine and justify the life-chances of individuals and that mental capacity was an intrinsic facet of a child which could be measured, compared against others and which was unchanging and unchangeable into adulthood was soon poached by politicians who saw an opportunity to justify stratified

educational and social systems, on the basis of 'scientific' fact. The fact that the dominant group of educationalists, scientists and policy makers had the power to define those characteristics necessary for entry into certain social positions and educational establishments served to reinforce racist attitudes as well as establishing concepts of normality and thus abnormality among children.

The fragility of such classifications, and the power which is inherent in the way that certain modes of seeing become taken as 'true', has been demonstrated by post-structuralists such as Foucault (1961, 1969, 1977, 1979) in relation to sexuality, criminality and madness and, later by Rose (1985, 1989) who argues that even our subjective lives are moulded and determined by social and political forces.

The power of psychological theory to shape lives could not be more clearly exemplified than by the techniques of intelligence testing which were utilised by Piaget in the 1920s. This 'ages and stages' theory of cognitive development was generated in response both to the need to categorise and control the population after World War 1, and to concerns about the welfare and education of children in general. Piaget's approach to testing, assessing and classifying children's mental and motor abilities formed the basis of the French school system and was soon adopted, with modifications, all over Europe, and indeed still underpins much of the school structure in the Western world today.

Whereas the anthropological model of studying childhood had been leading towards acceptance of difference and a respect for diverse cultural traditions, in less than two decades the psycho-medical model of the child had led to the institutionalised superiority of a white, middle-class, Christian childhood above all others, which formed the basis of a particularly pervasive standardised ideal of the 'normal' child in Western culture.

The drive towards establishing normative standards of physicality and behaviour reached a peak in the post war years in the USA when psychology was considered to hold the 'scientific' answers to questions which were previously in the domain of local, predominantly female and therefore 'amateur', knowledge. This paved the way for respected psychologists, such as Dr Arnold Gesell, to publish generalised yet very specific

statements about the 'normal' behaviour of children at different ages. The following conclusions were drawn by Gesell from his study of just 50 middle class American children in each age group:

At 2 years: There is little give-and-take in play, but much physical snatch-and-grab, and kicking and pulling hair.

The typical 4-year-old: Quarrelsome; boasts and threatens.

The typical 6-year-old: Highly emotional. There is a marked disequilibrium between the child and others. Lack of integration. Tends to go to extremes; oscillates. (Gesell 1946 quoted in Valentine 1956:31)

Adjunct to such narrow definitions of how children do and should behave, came much expert advice as to how best to discipline and raise one's child (Burt, Isaacs, Winnicott, Klein). One of the most influential practitioners in the 1950s and 1960s was John Bowlby (1953) who wrote of the absolutely crucial relationship of the infant with his/her mother and attributed many psychological and behavioural problems in later childhood to the lack of a proper mother/child bond at an early age (maternal deprivation as Bowlby termed it). By putting the responsibility for happy, healthy children squarely on the mother's shoulders, Bowlby reinforced the ideal of the closed nuclear family as the only suitable environment in which to bring up a child. The home environment was unquestionably the only way to provide children protection from the outside world. The concept of children as malleable, dependant and vulnerable was clearly a central facet of this construction of the child and was by now informing research and policy throughout Europe and America (eg The Children's Act in Britain in 1948 and the Children and Young Person's Act 1969).

Although the classify and control approach to social and educational policy was born out of a desire to protect and care for children, the tenets on which developmental psychology is based have been widely discredited. For example, Burman (1994) objects to the way in which tools of measurement produce research objects and research subjects and draws attention to the way in which normative descriptions provided by developmental psychologists slip into naturalised prescriptions. She sees psychological investigation as reflecting a wider theme of regulation which ignores the psychological context which individuals inhabit, and views developmental psychology as constructed within social practices and with a political agenda, rather than as an independent area of enquiry.

Burman, along with other theorists such as the Stainton- Rogers (1992), finds the overriding aim of developmental psychology, that is, arguably, to define the 'normal' child, as an unacceptable and pointless exercise:

The normal child, the ideal type, distilled from the comparative scores of age-graded populations, is...a fiction or myth...It is an abstraction, a fantasy, a production of the testing apparatus that incorporates, that constructs the child, by virtue of its gaze.'(Burman 1994:17)

The Marxist educationalist David Ingleby has similar concerns regarding child psychology and extends the account of the child as regulated and controlled to the moment of its birth and even before:

I start from the belief that practically every act in relation to a child...reflects constraints dictated by that child's place in the political system...In psychology, however, this determination is not simply ignored, but the evidence about it is suppressed by the very methodology of the profession. (Ingleby 1976:153)

That there is nothing neutral about science and scientific practices is now widely accepted¹, and yet the concept of the child as passing through set stages as he or she progresses towards adulthood and of the dangers of either missing a stage, transgressing the boundaries of a given stage or not being provided with what he or she needs at a certain stage continue to inform and characterise our understanding of childhood.

Even if we accept that there are some universal biological and psychological needs that are common to all children, Woodhead suggests that what are often taken as 'fundamental needs are actually about socially constructed, contextual needs.' (1996:91)

It was largely in response to this construction of the child as passive subject of their own socialisation, controlled and defined by adult experts that a new field of study began to grow in the 1970s and 80s which placed the child in the centre of their own social world and

¹ For example Latour and Woolgar's (1979) analysis of the social construction of scientific knowledge.

which started to listen to the child's voice and to reconstruct childhood in terms of children's agency.

2.1.2 Social Constructivism

The publication of Ariès' (1962) *Centuries of Childhood* opened up a new way of theorising about childhood by challenging the very concept of there being a universal, 'natural' state for children to inhabit and experience as they grow up.

The central argument of Ariès' work, (which was based on French culture but which has been generalised to encompass the rest of the Western world) is that up to and including the Middle Ages there was no concept of childhood as we think of it, and that children were not perceived as being tangibly different from anyone else:

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society this awareness was lacking. That is why, as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle rocker, he belonged to adult society. (Ariès 1962:125)

Although Ariès doesn't give a clear reason as to why children were not treated as special or distinct at this time he does assert that such neglect most likely stemmed from a certain cultural barrenness in terms of attributing meaning to childhood and a lack of value placed on education, rather than from incompetence or incapacity on the part of adults. As he baldly explains; 'there was no place for childhood in the medieval world.'

However, theorists such as Pollock (1983) and Bel Geddes (1997) have challenged Ariès' thesis on the grounds of primary material such as diaries and letters which demonstrate affection and care between parents and children during the Middle Ages and before, which they claim prove that children were prized and treasured as special and different people even then. Whether such evidence can substantiate the argument that childhood existed

then or simply confirms the obvious fact that children existed then and were subject to a degree of special treatment and care due to physical necessity is debatable. What gives Ariès' thesis a weight which his critics perhaps lack is the way in which his interpretation of what childhood is is located in a wider social and cultural context than simply on a review of common practices within the family.

The way in which Ariès achieved this broad perspective on attitudes towards children and childhood in the Middle Ages was to look at the cultural artefacts from this period. He noted that, with the exception of the motif of the mother and child (although even the baby Jesus appeared as a small shrunken man rather than as a rounded cherubic figure) children were largely absent from twelfth century art:

Medieval art until about the twelfth century did not know childhood or did not attempt to portray it. (Ariès 1962:31)

and that this suggested wider truths about the absence of childhood as a separate, special period at that time.²

Ariès' work is accredited with stimulating a new paradigm about childhood, which moved from biological to cultural definitions of the early period of life, and which was to form the basis of a huge body of research in the new field of Childhood Studies. Allison James describes the paradigm like this:

that childhood and children's experiences cannot be regarded as determined simply by their biological development. Instead....children and young people's experiences of growing up are mediated significantly by culture, which produces a diversity, rather than a commonality of childhoods both cross-culturally and through time

and that within this paradigm;

² Ariès' idea that cultural artefacts represent some kind of tellability index about the state of childhood in various cultures and societies is one which has gained weight in subsequent debates about the disappearance of childhood and children and consumerism eg Giroux (1998), Higonnet (1998), Postman (1994) Meyoritz (1985) – all works which will be considered in a later section.

the term **childhood** became used as a conceptual classification open to interpretation, and thus variation, rather than a simple and unproblematic description of a universal developmental phase. (James 2004:28)

Although the malleable character of childhood had already been identified by writers such as Jenks (1982) who described childhood as a state of being within cultures rather than as a ‘natural’ state, Hoyles (1979) who argued that childhood is a ‘social convention’ and Kessen (1979) who identified the American child as a ‘cultural invention’, this awareness of the socially constructed nature of childhood was made explicit in James and Prout’s (1990) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. This edited collection brought together, for the first time, research from a variety of disciplines which centred on the ways in which the child is a constructed subject and which rendered the child and childhood valid topics of social, and especially ethnographical, enquiry in their own right. Historical (eg Hendricks 1990), anthropological (eg Glauser 1990) and sociological (Qvortrup 1990) strands came together in this new interdisciplinary approach to childhood which aimed to overcome the separatist thinking about the area which had characterised previous research.

Within Childhood Studies a main element of concern which has dominated the field of enquiry has been the desire to make children’s voices heard and to present their experiences of constructing their own social worlds in terms of their agency. Studies such as Smith and Barker’s (2000) investigation into children’s experiences of out of school care demonstrate the child centred focus of the approach. In this study the children were involved at every stage of the research, from being consulted about suitable research methods to being asked if they agreed with the inferences drawn from content analysis of the gathered data.

This careful two-way research process works to empower children and to challenge narrow ideas of what childhood is and how it is experienced, and ties in with another key concern of the new paradigm – that of children’s rights (eg Archard 1993, Murray and Hallett 2000). Archard argues that concepts of age-linked competence are arbitrary and that individual rights should be granted in accordance with maturity and social context. In his view the huge significance of age for children and young people as an indicator of what they should be allowed to do and when is a further example of their domination and

oppression by adults and that in order to justify this, it is in the interests of the powerful group to ensure that by its very definition childhood is inferior to adulthood:

Childhood is defined as that which lacks the capacities, skills and powers of adulthood. (Archard 1993:30)

Such concerns as to the political nature of the boundaries placed around childhood relate to a wider set of arguments around the very definition of a child which have been debated for decades. Neil Postman (1994), writing in response to concerns about the negative influence of television on American children in the 1960s claimed that childhood had disappeared as the necessity of learning to be literate in order to have access to the adult world had become defunct thanks to television's immediate accessibility. His fear was that children were being transported back to medieval times where the boundaries between childhood and adulthood were fluid or non-existent and where there was no educational apprenticeship to be served as a rite of passage between the two states of being.

However, Cunningham points out that Postman's 'vision of a good childhood is not one in which the essence is freedom and happiness; rather it is good behaviour, a deference to adults, and a commitment to learning skills essential for the adult world.' (1995:180)

This idea that children need to be contained and obedient first, and happy second, reflects an underlying fear of children in Western culture which Jenks (1996) attributes to a certain concept of children as 'little savages' which originated from early nineteenth century ideas of the child needing to be socialised into being human rather than as being born as such. Indeed, harsh Victorian child-rearing methods can be attributed to this perceived need to break the child's will and thus allow the civilised individual to emerge. Analogies between such practices and wider social beliefs at that time relating to primitive 'savages' in far away places are not difficult to identify.

However, Jenks does not accept the placement of the 'savage' child as purely historical, but as one of several constructions of childhood that are always alive and vying for supremacy in various cultural contexts. For example, the 'Dionysian' child which 'rests on the

assumption of an initial evil or corruption within the child' (1996:70) competes with the image of the 'Apollonian' child who is 'angelic, innocent and untainted by the world' (1996:73)

Jenks' analysis of media stories and reports following the tragic murder of Jamie Bulger in Liverpool in 1993 by two ten year old boys brought to light the complicated, contradictory ideas and beliefs about childhood which make up our shared definition of the category. The main problem of classification was as follows: If children are by definition innocent then they can't be murderers, and vice versa, so what are they?

The way to solve the problem was through 'conceptual eviction'. In effect, the children who committed that dreadful crime were removed from the category 'child' altogether and were referred to in the media as 'freaks', 'monsters', 'demons' and such like. In order to preserve the category 'child' the transgressors were denied acceptance within it, thereby reaffirming to the public the essence of what a child is – that is; not evil, not an adult and a symbol of hope for the future and/or nostalgia for good times past.

Jenks' analysis of media reactions to the murderers of James Bulger reaffirms the strength of the four tenets on which the dominant Western ideal of childhood is based as identified by Hockey and James in their historical account of the emergence of contemporary conceptions of childhood. They are:

1. That the child is set apart temporally as **different**, through the calculation of age
 2. That the child is deemed to have a **special nature**, determined by nature
 3. That the child is **innocent**
- and
4. therefore **vulnerably dependent** (Hockey and James 1993)

However, radical theorists such as Edelman (2002) consider such romantic definitions of children and childhood to not only repress other versions of childhood, but also to render

the 'child' as a signifier of values which preclude any deviance from middle-class right wing edicts of 'normality':

The Child...marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism. And so, as the radical right maintains, the battle against queers is a life-and-death struggle for the future of a Child whose ruin is pursued by feminists, queers and those who support the legal availability of abortion. (Edelman 2002:21)

That the 'child' in its current construction has such a profound status in the justification and reinforcement of a conservative social order is testament to the strength of the concept of the 'normal' child and also indicates the urgent need for the dominance of such 'normality' to be challenged.

The next section begins by examining literature which deals with children who fall outside our constructed definition of 'normal' childhoods in one way or another due to unusual gifts, talents or experiences, and considers research which has attempted to locate these transgressions in a cultural rather than individual context.

2. 2: Exceptional Children and Child Stars

In light of the literature reviewed in the previous section it seems reasonable to assert that child stars are not 'normal' children in our society. The very fact that they work in a professional capacity negates their dependence on adults and challenges the modern concept of the 'emotionally priceless yet economically useless child' (Zelitzer 1985). The status of child stars as children in contemporary society is also challenged by entrenched ideas about the dangers of precocity and of growing up too soon. It is not surprising then that writing about child stars tends to cast them as victims of adult greed and cruelty, in order perhaps to avoid their 'conceptual eviction' from the category of 'child' altogether.

Literature directly concerning child stars of the stage and screen falls into two main categories – biographies and autobiographies. The former tend to follow a 'Whatever

happened to _____?’ style expose about the ‘shocking’ adult lives of child stars (for example; Lamparski 1967, Yallop 1976, McNeil 1996), whilst the latter are usually preoccupied with telling the ‘true’ story of the behind the scenes tears which under laid the terminally cheerful performances of the tormented star (e.g. Coleman 1981, Barry 1999, Cary 1997, Rooney 1965). The most successful of this genre was undoubtedly, *Child Star: An Autobiography* (1989) written by Shirley Temple Black when she was 61 years old and which was on the bestseller list for months as the public greedily devoured the ‘shocking details’ of her seemingly perfect early life. As the blurb states:

All was not always sugar-sweet aboard the Good Ship Lollipop: she was made to perform in exploitative movies by unscrupulous studio bosses; there were numerous kidnap threats and even a murder attempt against her; she made a disastrous teenage marriage to an incorrigible womaniser...

Zierold (1965) also lifted the lid on many Hollywood scandals in *The Child Stars* which reported in full the trials and tribulations of performers such as Jackie Coogan, Judy Garland, Freddie Bartholomew and Jackie Cooper. Putting paid to any doubt as to the detrimental effect of early stardom on young actors Zierold quotes forlorn former child stars at length such as Bobby Driscoll who won an Academy award as the best child actor of 1949 and then fell into obscurity:

I really feared people. The other kids didn’t accept me...I tried desperately to be one of the gang. When they rejected me, I fought back, became belligerent and cocky and was afraid all the time...I have found that memories are not very useful. I was carried on a silver cushion and then dropped into the garbage can. (Quoted in Zierold 1965:246)

Whilst the neglect of the education and well-being of many professionally performing children, particularly those who worked in Hollywood during the child star era, is incontestable, it does seem that writings about such experiences have become something of a stylised genre with a standard rags to riches (to rags) narrative and a cast of ghastly pushy parents and ‘Faganesque’ agents and directors. Indeed even children who worked in the presumably much more enlightened later decades of the twentieth century seem

permanently scarred by the experience that so many were, and still are, desperate to be part of. For example, Drew Barrymore's autobiography *Little Girl Lost* (1990), written when she was just fourteen years old and also a bestseller, identifies her dysfunctional family and her drug and alcohol addiction as the cause and effect of her need to act and be the centre of attention on a film set. Similarly, Angela Darvi's *Pretty Babies* (1983) describes her own and her contemporaries' experiences as child stars in the 1960s and 70s as exploitative and mercenary, even though she admits that the thrill and enjoyment of the lifestyle for those few that were successful made it worth all the stress and sacrifice – until, of course, one became too old or too big for the roles. To illustrate this point, Darvi quotes a diary entry she wrote when she was fifteen to convey the pain of being a has-been when still a child:

I have reached an in-between stage – too old for a child, too young for an adult. Acting was my outlet, my distinctiveness from others, my joy and emotional expressiveness. Now I'm just like everybody else, and I can't bear it. I'm dying! (Darvi 1967 quoted in 1983:165)

The genre of writing by or about former child stars clearly works to reinforce the dramatic and long term impact that child stardom has on an individual's life and tends to depict becoming famous as a youngster as a dangerous experience.

Interestingly, this idea that exceptional children are destined for unhappiness is not a new one and the child stars of the twentieth century seem to be subject to the same kinds of concerns which permeated writing two centuries ago about the perils of pushing children into adulthood before their time. For example, the eighteenth century enlightenment thinker Rousseau held strong views on the importance of ensuring children did not mature too quickly:

Nature wants children to be children before they are men. If we deliberately pervert this order, we shall get premature fruits which are neither ripe nor well-flavoured, and which soon decay...childhood has ways of seeing, thinking and feeling peculiar to itself; nothing can be more foolish than to substitute our ways for theirs. (Rousseau quoted in Jenks 1996:3)

Furthermore, in his appraisal of Victorian manuals on pedagogy and child-rearing, Kincaid (1992) notes that any kind of precocity was viewed as dangerous to the future health and moral well-being of the child and experts issued the severest of warnings to parents and educators, for example;

Children who are prodigies in learning, music and other pursuits, are generally destroyed by premature disease in the brain. (Quoted in Kincaid 1992:121)

Given the prevalence of such spurious medical opinion it is no wonder the prodigious child was reviled and feared by some of the more conservative and religious sectors of Victorian society who needed to believe and have confirmed the ‘naturalness’ of the rightful place of the child - below and behind adults in every possible way.

Kincaid argues that the Victorian distaste for the precocious child emanated from a fear of sexual precocity more than anything else, a fear which he claims is still alive today in our:

strong even if sneaking aversion to the self-assured, knowing child, the brat. (Kincaid 1992:123)

In a rare attempt to analyse current hostile public reactions to child stars Joal Ryan (2000) explores the issue of why child stars are so often conceptualised as being cursed by their early success and why their attempts at adult careers are met with mocking disdain or indifference and their trials and tribulations with glee. The title of her book; *Former Child Stars: The Story of America's Least Wanted* captures the irony and the tragedy of the adored child stars who grow up into mutated versions of their perfect childlike selves and become publicly reviled for their inability to stay ‘cute’ and ‘natural’. For example, Gary Coleman, aka ‘The Nation’s Favourite Kid’ who was the terminally tiny younger brother on the hugely popular US sitcom *Diff’rent Strokes* in the 1980s lost all hope of an adult career when the series was cancelled in 1986. Working as a security guard in 1999 he assaulted a woman who called him a ‘washed-up child star’ and became a national laughing stock via the publicity from the trial. His pain at not having lived up to his childhood potential and

his inability to disassociate his adult self from his childhood persona has clearly become his personal cross to bear:

I long for days where I'm not recognised. I look forward to days when I'm not recognised. But since I've been on TV in practically every...country in the world there's really no place that doesn't know me. (Coleman quoted in Ryan 2000:3)

Despite many accounts of child stars who have grown up to lead successful, or at least comfortable adult lives (such as Jodie Foster and Ron Howard), Ryan explains our fascination with stories about child stars 'gone bad' as a rather sinister way of reaffirming that we don't need them anymore, that their time has come and gone and that without us, without our support and adoration they are nothing. Whilst there is undoubtedly an element of schadenfreude, perhaps infused with jealousy, about the way in which scandalous media stories about child stars are presented, Ryan's theory cannot account for the way such stories become powerful tools of control in naturalising certain versions of childhood and criminalising others, and also does not explain how these stories work in relation to wider power structures which define and uphold the boundaries between childhood and adulthood.

Following on from the literature reviewed in the previous section, this concept of what is normal in childhood experience is clearly fundamental to the definition and creation of the category of exceptional children in general, and of child stars in particular. After all without a benchmark of what is 'normal' how are we to know when to label someone as exceptional? However, most of the existing literature, and almost all peer reviewed studies, on gifted children are about the academically, sporting or musically talented rather than child actors or singers, and are located firmly within the research interests of the fields of educational and developmental Psychology.

This body of work is enormous, (much of it published in specialist journals such as *Gifted Child Quarterly*) and ranges from advising parents and professionals how to identify a child genius (Grinder 1985), to advice on how to encourage a child to be a genius (Adams 1988) to analysis of differences between gifted and nongifted children (Alexander 1985), to

longitudinal studies on the subsequent lives and careers of child prodigies (Bamberger 1982) to the provision of specialised education for the gifted child (O'Brien (1985) and concerns over the psychological and emotional well-being of gifted children who may be 'hothoused' (Gallagher and Sigel 1987).

Unsurprisingly, given the centrality of the nature-nurture polemic in developmental and educational research, one of the major issues of debate in the psychological literature on child prodigies is whether geniuses are made or born, and what kind of hereditary or environmental factors may influence the gifted child. Howe (1988), for example, contests the idea that 'natural' genius will flourish in any conditions and argues for the importance of intellectually stimulating home and school environments in engendering special abilities, whereas celebrated stories about child prodigies from earlier eras, including those about Mozart (1756-1791) who played the harpsichord at three and publicly performed his own compositions at age five, have tended to rely on the 'genius from nowhere' explanation which explains the prodigious child's talents as a mysterious gift from the divine

Radford's (1990) *Child Prodigies and Exceptional Early Achievers*, although dealing largely with the psychological causes and consequences of early achievement and the bafflingly inconsistent adult lives of so-called child prodigies, also includes some limited sociological insights into the function and role of such children in society and places the slippery, social nature of 'genius' at the centre of his study:

Genius shows itself as the capacity to do something much better than most other people; thus it is defined by what human beings can do. This in turn is not fixed but constantly changes as we continually change our environment. (Radford 1990:34)

Even given the changing parameters of what is defined as exceptional talent, the key element of the gifted child seems to be the demonstration of aptitudes and abilities which are considered unusually good for a child of a particular age in comparison with other children of that age. In this sense then, child prodigies can be understood in terms of being abnormal according to the tenets of developmental psychology, with the stigma of being

extraordinary deriving from the modernist urge to uniformity which characterises contemporary educational policies.

However, as Radford points out, there seems to be a much more emotional investment in the exceptional child than such a narrow scientific definition would allow and the notion that certain, special children have supernatural powers or are ‘sent’ to earth to teach us something about the mysteries of life has persisted for centuries and surprisingly continues to hold currency even in our secular, scientific age. For example, Feldman’s (1986) study of six child prodigies concentrates more on the why questions about exceptional early achievers than the hows, and concludes that high IQ alone is not a sufficient reason to explain such ‘distinctive and revealing phenomenon’:

I believe that the prodigy has something special to tell us about the psychological purpose of human development – in effect, how potential is fulfilled...The prodigy...gives us a hint about why we are here and what we are trying to make of ourselves. (Feldman 1986 in Radford 1990:28)

Furthermore, a child does not have to be extraordinary in an academic sense in order to generate this kind of reaction. Indeed as Michael Newton (2002) describes in his study of feral children, the ‘savage’ child who is found living at one with nature becomes at once fascinating and frightening for what he/she can tell us about what it really means to be human and the negligible robustness of what we consider to be our essential selves. Tying in fictional (eg Romulus and Remus, Mowgli in the *Jungle Book*) and true stories of feral children such as Kaspar Hauser and the Wolf-Children of Mindapore, Newton demonstrates how such narratives cross the line between art and life again and again as the protagonists become vehicles for debate about profound spiritual matters rather than being treated as actual, real people. They become, in a sense, more than simply children- a potential which all children who break through the accepted boundaries of childhood seem to possess.

From the existing literature then it appears that exceptional children can be exceptional in many different ways, as long as their experience somehow defies that which is considered

‘normal’, and the very fact that they stand apart from the crowd seems to ignite all sorts of speculation and interest as to the implications of their wonderful ‘gift’.

However, even though the child star is usually exceptional in terms of his/her talent for performance there seems to be a certain hostility in our attitudes towards such youngsters that is not evident in public attitudes towards, for example, young chess champions, footballers or mathematicians. This is also implicit in the notable absence of any academic studies relating directly to the psychological and social characteristics of child stars, suggesting that as a focus for research they have been overlooked for some reason and are not to be taken seriously. To all intents and purposes they are all but invisible in the academic literature on gifted children, as if they are not real people but simply characters in the stories they act out and whose own lives become nothing more than stories themselves, to be published in biographies and autobiographies and discussed on talk shows, but never collated or analysed as documents of cultural or social importance.

However, far from being irrelevant to discussions about children and childhood I think the child star sits at the centre of, and potentially connects, several fields of research relating to our understanding of childhood in contemporary culture. For example, the contradictory responses of adoration and suspicion which seem to complicate and stigmatise the experience of being, or of having been, a child star can be seen as symptomatic of wider concerns about the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood which have haunted the entertainment industry since the explosion of electronic media and with it the proliferation of images of the child, in the mid twentieth century. The next section considers literature which relates to images of children, paedophilia and the politics of childhood innocence and how these discourses are connected to the fraught construction of the child star in late modern society.

2.2.1 *The Politics of Innocence*

In *Pictures of Innocence* (1998) Anne Higonnet reviews the changing symbolic value of the image of the child through history and sees the construction of childhood innocence as both a commercial and social reaction to modern ideas about the family and individualism. As

with Ariès, Higonnet identifies the mid eighteenth century as a time of major transformation regarding the status and corresponding visual history of childhood. Before this time she notes that children were portrayed, in appearance and behaviour, simply as small adults indicating their future social status, be they Kings or beggars.

The image of childhood innocence, she claims, first appeared in the work of British portrait painters such as Gainsborough, Reynolds and Raeburn who created visual representations of a Romantic childhood (the most famous piece of work being Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* c.1770) as commissions for the elite, which later became immensely popular as prints and adverts due to the burgeoning mass market of industrially produced illustration. In contrast to the stern faced small adults of earlier paintings, pictures of the Romantic child told no story about future adult life, with its cherubic subjects languishing in a wholly carefree, beautiful, innocent and, of course, completely fictional, world of childhood. Such images were so successful, according to Higonnet because they embodied the following new attitudes crucial to modern life:

- a private, nurturing middle-class nuclear family as the building block of society
- a capitalist opposition between masculine public and feminine domestic spheres
- a political belief in the innate worth of the individual which was also reflected in literature of the time, most famously in Rousseau's *Emile* (1762)

and also because of the nostalgic longings such feminised and idyllic versions of childhood engendered:

The modern child is always the sign of a bygone era, of a past which is necessarily the past of adults, yet which, being so distinct, so sheltered, so innocent, is also inevitably a lost past, and therefore understood through the kind of memory we call nostalgia. (Higonnet 1998:27)

Higonnet explains how the modern conception of the child is built on such mythic eighteenth century values of childhood innocence and naturalism and how such images proliferated and became reinforced as the 'norm' by feminine consumer practices of buying prints of romantic children. Clearly the image of the innocent child delighted and continues

to delight adults - a fact that advertising agencies have capitalised on for many years. Higonnet also considers the ubiquitous Kodak moment snapshots of happy, healthy, smiling children found in every Western household as modern day reflections of the qualities embodied in paintings of Romantic children. In effect, she argues, we take the shots which fulfil our expectations of what childhood should be and the image of the child invented in eighteenth Century Romantic art has become the standardised norm and inherited ideal on which we base our own visual culture.

Higonnet observes that the way in which images of Romantic children firmly differentiate the child from the adult and place them in a separate, wonderful, mythical world of childhood creates a desire for the child and for childhood based on the innocence which is portrayed. Romantic children don't 'know' adults and are also unconscious of adult desires, rendering it possible for adults to project whatever they need and want to see onto the image of the child.

However, Higonnet claims that the last decade has seen new images of children appearing in the media which are much more physical and challenging than the Romantic ones and which portray in children a certain knowingness of their 'innocent' appeal. Controversial pictures of children smoking cigarettes and posing provocatively, such as in the work of Sally Mann, flaunt the very sexual innocence that was at the core of the Romantic child ideal and, to a lesser degree of controversy but with a higher degree of exposure, many advertising campaigns and popular images seem to hinge on the sexual appeal of children. Higonnet concludes her study by identifying the legacy that the cult of childhood innocence has left us with and voices her concerns about the consequences to the child when that innocence is exploited and inverted as a slick marketing ploy:

The image of childhood created in the 18th Century has run its course, and is now being replaced by another way of picturing childhood...The image of childhood innocence is now in jeopardy not just because it is being violated, but because it was seriously flawed all along...innocence turns out to be highly susceptible to commercialisation. The ideal of the child as object of adoration has turned all too easily into the concept of the child as object, and then into the marketing of the child as commodity. (Higonnet 1998:194)

In contrast to Higonnet's view that cultural representations of children have transcended into new territories, Marina Warner (1994) considers that the nostalgic worship of childhood innocence is more marked today than it has ever been because of our 'nagging, yearning desire to work back to a pristine state of goodness'. Warner explains how the difference between the child and the adult has become a dominant theme in contemporary mythology due to children's 'observable, active fantasy life, their fluid make believe play' and their supposed preternatural wisdom. In effect, she argues that children provide us with certain sentiments and feelings of hopefulness which we can't find elsewhere and which we desperately need in an increasingly commercialised, fragmented and secular society. However, she warns that the consecration of childhood to such an extent renders ordinary children failures because they can't live up to such exacting standards:

Children aren't separate from adults...they can't live innocent lives on behalf of adults...Nor can individuals who happen to be young act as the living embodiments of adults inner goodness, however, much adults may wish it....Children are our copy, in little. (Warner 1994:48)

Warner warns how the reification of childhood purity and innocence in our culture paradoxically puts children more at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation because, as she so aptly describes it; 'pornography clusters to the sacred and the forbidden like wasps' nests in chimneys' (ibid:46).

Kincaid (1992) also views the artificial separation of children from adults as central to the eroticisation of children in our culture. He explains how divisions between adults and children are built on binary distinctions such as innocence and experience, ignorance and knowledge and incapacity and competence, arbitrary divisions which all derive strength from the culturally defined sexual differences between the two groups:

the division between adult and child...has been for at least the last 200 years heavily eroticised: the child is that species which is free of sexual feeling or response; the adult is that species which has crossed over into sexuality. The definitional base is erotic and our discourse insists on it by loudly denying its importance. (Kincaid 1992:7)

Kincaid considers that without such a disassociation our position and identity as adults is seriously threatened and thus we continue to turn a blind eye to the way in which our culture eroticises children, preferring instead to vilify paedophiles as ‘evil monsters’ thus turning attention away from complex issues which challenge our family structure and social system at large. Kincaid argues that paedophilia is a necessary cultural position conjured up as the perverted ‘other’ against which ‘we’ can judge ourselves as ‘normal’. The paedophile then is the logical extension of our child-loving culture which not only presents innocent and pure qualities as being embodied in the child, but also forbids desiring the child sexually:

The child has been made desirable, and we must blame someone, namely the paedophile, as much a necessary cultural construction as a real-life criminal. (Kincaid 1992:184)

Kincaid draws attention to the huge amount of chattering about paedophiles and paedophilia in newspapers, magazines, novels, TV dramas, films and news programmes which, he claims, suggests an obsession with child-love about which there is only one acceptable opinion – it is evil and its perpetrators are heinous. Whilst in no way condoning the activities of paedophiles Kincaid makes an important point here about why it is that the power structures between children and adults which are inherent in our society create the need for certain images of children as naïve, innocent and cute on one hand and why we seem to have an insatiable desire for information about abused, abducted and mistreated children on the other. With such uncomfortable contradictions in our cultural and psychological relationship with children it is little wonder we feel the need to shift all blame and responsibility onto a few monsters from whom our children need to be protected.

Henry Giroux (1998) also questions the helpfulness of locating the site of child sexual abuse within the realms of a marginalised minority of ‘evil perverts’ rather than looking more carefully at our culture in general and at our projections onto and representations of children in particular. In reference to the popularity of child beauty pageants in the US he highlights the growing tendency to conflate childlike beauty with adult beauty. Giroux suggests that to hold children up as objects of desire, and then castigate those who respond sexually to that stimulus places responsibility for abuse firmly with the perpetrator without

also sharing that responsibility among all who are involved in creating, reproducing or enjoying images which present children as innocently beautiful.

Giroux considers the myth of childhood innocence to be disempowering and dangerous to children as it:

not only erases the complexities of childhood...but it also offers an excuse for adults to evade responsibility for how children are firmly connected to and shaped by the social and cultural institutions run largely by adults. Innocence in this instance makes children invisible except as projections of adult fantasies. (Giroux 1998: 31)

This idea of the child as a blank canvas or empty vessel, powerless in the face of adult control is central to Kincaid's extreme constructivist understanding of the 'child' as a mere textual category which can be filled with or assigned any meaning which suits adult society and sentiments at the time. In such a figuration then, the child;

is not, in itself, anything but a cultural formation and an object of adult desire, a function necessary to our psychic and cultural life. (Kincaid 1992:5)

Given the potential emptiness of the category 'child', it becomes fascinating to see what kind of appearances, behaviours and qualities children are imbued with in popular cultural products such as TV programmes, films and advertising campaigns as such representations may be extremely telling as to our collective definition of the meanings which we ascribe to childhood and children. Indeed the child on stage or screen is surely the emptiest of them all, consisting entirely of adult design and speaking only the words put into its mouth by adults. The following section reviews some key research studies on media representations of children.

2.2.2 Media Representations of Children

It is important to make the distinction here between research on children as media consumers and that which focuses on representations of children in the media.

Contrary to early fears about the adverse effects that watching television may have on children's moral and social development, contemporary studies suggest that children are, in fact, able to clearly separate fantasy from reality at a very young age and that they are active, rather than passive consumers of television. For example, Buckingham's extensive work in this area (1987, 1993, 1999) has shown that children construct meaning as they watch, and that talking about television becomes a way of reinforcing their social identities and of aligning themselves with, or distancing themselves from, peer groups. Oswell (1998) also challenges the concepts of the child-as-victim and the child-in-danger in reference to media technologies. In his study of the place of childhood in internet regulation he opposes the way in which childhood is figured discursively as a problem, and argues that protection can actually work against children's interests by limiting their access to the 'world' outside the domestic bubble.

However, studies on representations of children in the visual media suggest that the 'real' child sitting at home as part of the audience and the 'ideal' child whose image is projected on screen, although conceptually linked, are poles apart. Research in this area demonstrates that the manipulation of the image of the child in the media appears to be both predictably mercenary, in that there is little concern for the actual experiences of, or consequences to, 'real' children, and surprisingly uniform, as children tend to be used to fulfil the same kind of emotional and psychosocial needs in various cultures.

For example, Valerie Walkerdine (1997) studied portrayals of little girls in a variety of media in Britain and the USA in certain periods of history. She found that not only did characters such as Little Orphan Annie fulfil adult fantasies about the self-made underdog achieving the American dream, but that the qualities ascribed to Annie were 'deeply resistant to the normative model of the child' (p84). Instead of embodying traditional female qualities such as gentleness, vulnerability and domesticity, Annie was essentially a child with the mind of an adult, rough round the edges, smart and savvy, tough with a big heart, totally without family, education or social status and yet utterly incorruptible. In answer to her question as to the social and psychological conditions which produced Little Orphan Annie, Walkerdine concludes that the emotional appeal of the character lies in her autonomy and moral strength and that she is:

The apotheosis of a particular version of American-ness, the one which takes immigrants and children of immigrants who may no longer know their own histories, but who can create their life opportunities through guts and hard work even in the toughest of situations. (Walkerdine 1997:89)

Roland Marchand (1985) in his study of the role of children in the still advertisements which appeared in the USA in the 1920s and 1930s also found that the image of the child can be used to reaffirm desirable social attitudes:

Of the supporting actors and actresses in the social tableaux, few were more stereotyped than the children. Two children invariably meant a boy and a girl, never two girls or two boys. Virtually never were children described or depicted in such a way as to suggest distinctly individual personalities. Except when the selling message specifically dictated otherwise, children were healthy, fastidiously groomed and attired and impeccable in behaviour. (Marchand 1985:191)

Unsurprisingly, as Marchand points out, these scenes depicting the family circle had more to do with the public's need for a sense of stability and security in a rapidly changing society than with the social reality of childhood or family life:

In an age of anxieties about family relationships and centrifugal social forces, this visual cliché was no social mirror; rather it was a reassuring pictorial convention. (Marchand 1985:254)

That images of children are laden with social significance is also recognised by Wolfenstein (1954) in her analysis of the image of the child in film and literature. Through comparing representations of children from several European countries and the USA she concludes that specific cultural ideals are reflected in child characters:

Children as they appear in art, literature, drama or films embody a complex mixture of fantasy and reality. They represent memories and dreams of adults about their own lost childhoods, as well as feelings about those mysterious beings, their own children. (Wolfenstein 1954:277)

For example, Huckleberry Finn expresses an American ideal of the 'good, strong, self-sufficient child' who is resourceful and independent, whereas Dickens's *Oliver Twist* represents a noble if vulnerable and weak child in need of protection and gentleness which Wolfenstein suggests corresponds to a major theme in British culture- that of the worthiness of the adult in comparison to the pure nature of the child. In Italian literature and film there is a recurring image of the child as a saviour, reflecting strong associations between the redemptive power of the Christ-child and the potential of all children to bear the cross of mankind and show adults the power of love, whereas in French films the sad and yearning child whose dreams of love are bound to be disappointed stands in contrast to the adult characters who already know this disappointment but are given renewed hope through contact with the naïve child.

However, even given the differences in nuance in the representations of children in these cultures due to varying religious, literary and historical traditions, Wolfenstein identifies a common thread in the portrayals:

Children in the films of the four cultures considered here all have something in common. They are noble characters, usually nobler than the adults around them...in one way or another, they represent moral demands and ideals. (Wolfenstein 1954:291)

Kenway and Bullen (2001) in their study *Consuming Children* also found that certain stock images of children as embodiments of fundamental values and purity abound in popular culture. They explain that, as typified in the *Home Alone* movies (1990, 1992 and 1997), the particular niche which children occupy in film and TV shows is often one of the quick-witted, wise and moral child who easily outwits irresponsible, foolish or immoral adults, thus exposing the artifice and/or corruption of the social order. This role of the child as clever and good in contrast to the greedy or wicked adult is a staple of fairy-tales and classic literature and reinforces ideals about the innocent wisdom of childhood and the inherent differences between children and adults.

Ironically however, as Kenway and Bullen explain, changes in the ways contemporary childhood is marketed, experienced and consumed mean that differences between child and

adult culture may now be much less tangible than in the past. They point out that the image of the child as selfless, honest and morally above adults:

is not always the case in the particular world of children's consumer culture of which the Home Alone films are representative. Young people today are offered identities as pleasure-seeking, self-indulgent, autonomous, rational decision makers. They are more often precocious than innocent. (Kenway and Bullen 2001:86)

The idea that the very cultural images which reinforced the constructed differences between children and adults and helped perpetuate the cult of childhood innocence may now be responsible for its collapse is taken up by Kinder (1995). In her analysis of American televisual culture, Kinder describes the way in which the illusory empowerment of the precocious child and the infantilised adult is reflected in consumerist culture which works to encourage children to illicitly indulge in adult culture and to provide the means for adults to retain their youth by both keeping up with pop culture's latest fads and by buying into products which evoke a sense of nostalgia about lost childhoods. In a similar vein to Postman's (1962) argument about the disappearance of childhood referred to earlier in this review, Meyrowitz (1985) has also identified this blurring of the states of childhood and adulthood as a consequence of the electronic media which demystifies adult authority and wisdom and provides children with adult knowledge. He claims that as a result both adult and child roles shift towards a 'middle-region, all-age role.'

In their conclusion to *Consuming Children* Kenway and Bullen agree that childhood is changing and that we are entering a new stage in the construction and reconstruction of childhood and youth as the demarcation between education, entertainment and advertising collapse and transgenerational boundaries blur and shift:

consumer-media culture in its various forms has transformed the lives of children, the institutions of the family and the school and, ultimately, the 'nature' of childhood. (Kenway and Bullen 2001:9)

Although Kenway and Bullen's theory that the young are no longer constructed simply as sites for adult pleasure, but as powerful and knowing consumers themselves seems to

describe current social changes on one level, it could be argued that it underestimates the strength of the myth of childhood innocence which is inherent in the cultural and political institutions of our society and which is blatantly manifested in representations of children in the media.

Indeed, as Kincaid's (1992) analysis of media images of children demonstrates, the form children take in popular culture is startlingly homogenous and blatantly erotic, with icons of childhood generally being, 'big-eyed, kissy-lipped blonde figures'. He notes that Jackie Coogan, Shirley Temple, Ricky Schroeder, Drew Barrymore, River Phoenix and Macaulay Culkin all epitomised this Western version of the idealised child, with the white skin/blonde hair combination signifying the ultimate in innocence. Kincaid argues that by highlighting the very aspects of children which appeal to paedophiles (such as their purity and 'beautifully empty' look) this recurring image of the child in popular culture clearly fulfils erotic longings for the child which are largely unremarked upon. Kincaid documents how the eroticisation of certain body parts of such children, the bottom in particular, is included in many films which have gratuitous swimming, bathing or un-dressing for bed scenes as well as scenes of spankings or beatings:

the image of the cute, huggable, beatable child is likely so powerful that we not only cannot do without it but cannot even recognise our own need. It has become second nature, this desire...in our minds and in our art and in our lives. When somebody brings it to our attention therefore, it seems absurd. (Kincaid 1992:375)

In his analysis of the appeal of Shirley Temple in the 1920s and 1930s, Bret Wood (1994) also describes as peculiar the way in which a tiny child imbued with qualities of both sensual precociousness and childish naïveté in her film roles was considered utterly acceptable to the movie-going public. In the infamous *Baby Burlesques* three year old Temple stood in her panties winking, smiling and shaking her shoulders and at the age of five she played a professional seductress dressed in black lace lingerie in *Polly Tix in Washington* (1933). Embodying wifely virtues of devotion, affection, generosity and vulnerability Woods argues that Temple became the ultimate feminised movie star, rescued

from poverty by handsome sugar daddies in her films time and again and yet innocent enough to be totally unthreatening:

Temple's popularity was a distinct backlash against the gold-diggers played by Mae West and Jean Harlow...Such women were too intimidating to the conservative, upper-middle-class male, so Temple stepped in, a stunted figure of feminine sexuality in an era of economy and restriction. (Wood 1994:34)

This use of the performing child to represent that which is missing or lost in adult society has also been recorded in a quite different social context by Steedman (1995) in her study of child acrobats and actors in Victorian England. According to Steedman, the individual and personal history that a child embodied came to be used to represent human interiority and the unconscious in this period. The 'strange dislocations' of the child acrobat performing in public spaces drew attention to debates around the proper treatment of children in much the same way as chimney sweeps and factory children did. However, the fact that the acrobats were performing for the pleasure of adults complicated such sentiments. The pity felt at seeing children perform contortions for an audience and the desire of the audience to see such performances is identified by Steedman as illustrative of the inherent paradox of childhood which has so complicated the relationship between adults and children since the eighteenth century:

children were **both** the repositories of adults' desires....**and** social beings, who lived in social worlds and networks of social and economic relationships, as well as in the adult imagination. (Steedman 1995:97)

This duality of childhood as both a lived experience and an idea to be used by adults to fulfil deep-seated longings seems as relevant to today's child stars as it did to the little acrobats of Victorian London. Indeed, as Steedman observes, the performing child has long had, and probably will always have, profound meanings projected onto it:

The search is for the self, and the past that is lost and gone; and...since the end of the 18th century, the lost object has come to assume the shape and form of a child. (Steedman 1995:174)

2.3 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter has explained how our concept of the 'normal' child has been built upon a conceptual and material separation of adults and children over the last two hundred years, and how the ideal of childhood innocence has been and continues to be central to this division. The second section examined the implications of this arbitrary separation to those children who fall outside the socially constructed boundaries of childhood by being exceptional in some way, and reviewed related research concerning the sexualisation and commercialisation of the image of the child. By focussing on a cross section of research on gifted and precociously able children, paedophilia, consumerism and media representations of children it has been shown that a multitude of competing discourses underpin our current construction of the category 'child star'. This complex range of influences renders such individuals objects of concern, desire, revulsion, fascination, envy or pity depending on the angle of the lens through which we gaze at them and I have shown that it is this very 'emptiness' to represent whatever is required by their audience that most comprehensively determines and defines the child star.

It has been demonstrated that autobiographical and biographical literature pertaining to child stars is abundant, but that there has been no academic research on the way in which the category 'child star' is constructed in the media and how such categorisation may carry significant meaning in our culture. It is this gap that the current research is intended to fill.

This chapter has contextualised the child star within existing theoretical understandings of 'normal' and 'extraordinary' children. It has demonstrated that the child star derives its meaning and cultural significance from being both different from 'normal' children and different from other 'extraordinary' children such as academic geniuses and feral children. The next chapter considers the contemporary child star as a product of both its own genealogy and wider changes in ideas about childhood, fame and entertainment. The Social History of the Child Star demonstrates the universality and cultural specificity of young performers and also provides a useful guide to the main figures in the child star hall of fame.

Chapter 3: A Social History of Child Stars

The previous chapter identified child stars as ‘abnormal’ in relation to the constructed ideal tenets of Western childhood due both to their unusual childhood experiences and their association with precocious sexuality and the commercialisation of childhood. This chapter aims to explore the specific history of the child star in more detail by tracing the social, cultural and economic influences which contributed to the emergence of the group as a distinct and culturally significant phenomenon in the twentieth century.

Although the child star in our modern understanding of the term was a product of the wider Hollywood star system in the 1920s and 30s, the concept of certain children as deserving recognition and adoration is an ancient and universal one. Indeed, one could argue that in Western culture at least, the Christ child was the very first child star. Certainly the overwhelming popularity of the ‘Virgin and Child’ and the ‘Adoration of the Kings’ as artistic subject matter from the twelfth century onwards pays testament to the fundamental importance and endurance of the image of the reified, beautiful child as a symbol of preternatural wisdom and redemption.

The association of the purity and hope represented by the baby Jesus with the adorable child performer was one which Hollywood clearly seized upon with their troop of angelic starlets such as Shirley Temple and Jackie Coogan. The impact of mythical and symbolic influences on the creation and recreation of the child star is explored in depth in a later chapter which examines the universal significance of the ‘wonder-child’ archetype. For the present however, this chapter is concerned with the material rather than figurative antecedents of today’s child stars, namely the child actors and performers who have recurred, with varying degrees of success and recognition, since antiquity. Whilst a comprehensive account of all recorded instances of child performers throughout history is beyond the scope of this study, what follows is a series of snapshots of key periods when child performers became particularly visible or important, often due to changes in modes of cultural production or public demand.

The metamorphosis of the child performer into the child star will be shown to be a process involving a gradual shift in emphasis from what a child can do as well as an adult, to what a child can do which encapsulates the romantic ideal of that which is charming and 'childlike'. That this shift from the functional to the allegorical coincided with wider changes in the status of children over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries illustrates both the socially constructed nature of the child star and the usefulness of analysing attitudes towards child performers in order to gauge broader opinions about childhood in general.

What I hope to demonstrate is the extent to which the performing child has never been a neutral category and that attitudes towards children in general, the theatre in particular and wider economic, religious and social issues have all played a part in their construction and reconstruction over time. The culmination of this has been the modern image of the child star, a cultural stereotype which has become enshrined in the collective consciousness as a peculiar mix of precocious talent, synthetic charm and unhappy misfortune.

3.1 Early Child Actors

Putting aside the myriad forgotten and unrecorded amateur child street performers who have doubtless danced, tumbled and begged their way through all the marketplaces of history, the first tenuous evidence of children performing professionally on stage comes from ancient Greece. Griffiths (1997) claims, from a textual analysis of Greek extant tragedy, that child parts were cued in differently and more explicitly than adult parts and concludes, somewhat inconclusively, that child characters were indeed played by child actors, although the social status and biographies of such individuals can only be speculated upon.

It is not until Elizabethan England that child actors are well documented both on and off stage, when young boys played the parts of women and sometimes old men, as well as children, in Shakespearian plays. Several of Shakespeare's plays capitalise on the effect of boys acting women, who then take on disguise as boys and the use of child actors was an intrinsic part of such productions as women were not allowed to appear on stage at that time. The Puritans, needless to say, disapproved of the theatre in general and were

particularly scandalized by boys cross-dressing as women. However, regardless of religious indignation, the young actors proved so popular that two whole acting companies were created in London with solely child performers – the Children of the Chapel Royal and the Paul’s Boys. These boys’ companies consisted of eight to twelve boys of various ages and types, some of whom seemed to have been pressed into service against their will due to their appealing looks and voice. There is evidence even from this time that certain child actors had ‘star’ quality and were lauded for their individual talents. In 1603 Ben Jonson wrote a moving epitaph of one such actor, Solomon Pavy, who had performed in many of his plays. Pavy was pressed into service in 1600 at the age of 10 and died three years later. Jonson’s moving epitaph suggests that the child acted old age too well and laments the cruelty of fate in taking him so young:

*Years he numbered scarce thirteen
When fates turn’d cruel,
Yet three fill’d zodiacs had he been
The stage’s jewel:
And did act, what now we moan, Old men so duly,
As, sooth, the Parcae [the three Fates] thought him one,
He play’d so truly*

(Jonson 1603 quoted on www.ise.uvic.ca/Library/SLTnoframes/stage/childactors.html)

The boys’ companies gradually fell out of favour as they were involved in various scandals in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century culminating in a disastrous performance of *Eastward Ho* by Jonson, Marston and Chapman in 1605 by the Children of the Chapel. The play contained a passage about Scots which offended King James so much that the Children lost their royal patronage and the authors were briefly imprisoned. Apart from a short resurgence of interest with the Beeston’s Boys company from 1637-42, the time of the children’s companies was over – stage children of later periods would never have such a respected status again.

The shift from the use of children as actors to freshen up ensemble pieces to the idea of a particular child as being worthy of special attention seemed to arise from the realisation of the potential entertainment and fiscal value of an individual child who was in some way extraordinary. This revelation came in the form of the eighteenth century musical prodigy,

the most famous of this impressive and precociously talented group being Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) who began to play the harpsichord at three and at five composed an 'Andante and Allegro', giving his first public performance at that age to gasps of wonderment. In the next century it was Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47) who most impressed, giving his first concert as a professional pianist at nine and composing 'truly remarkable' pieces at the ages of ten and eleven. Others in this illustrious category included Paganini, Liszt and Beethoven, although the link between 'natural genius' and wealthy and indulgent parents has yet to be explained psychologically. The popularity and peculiarity of such child prodigies is apparent from the following excerpt of a letter to the Royal Society of Music describing an eye witness account of one of Mozart's early performances:

If I was to send you a well attested account of a boy who measured seven feet in height, when he was no more than eight years of age, it might be considered as not undeserving the notice of the Royal Society. The instance which I now desire you will communicate to that learned body, of as early an exertion of most extraordinary musical talents, seems perhaps equally to claim their attention.....I carried to (Mozart) a manuscript duet, which was composed by an English gentleman to some favourite words in Metastasio's opera of Demosoonte. My intention in carrying with me this manuscript composition was to have an irrefragable proof of his abilities, as a player at sight, it being absolutely impossible that he could have ever seen the music before. The score was no sooner put upon his desk, than he began to play the symphony in a most masterly manner, as well as in the time and stile which corresponded with the intention of the composer. I mention this circumstance, because the greatest masters often fail in these particulars on the first trial..... His extemporary compositions also, of which I was a witness, prove his genius and invention to have been most astonishing...

(Account of a very remarkable young Musician. In a Letter from the Honourable Daines Barrington, F.R.S. to Mathew Maty, M.C. Sec. R.S. Received November 28, 1769 published on www.openmozart.net)

There was evidently a place for prodigious children in popular entertainment and the excitement of discovering or identifying young wonders is palpable in this piece. The way in which Mozart is described as a 'genius', 'astonishing' and 'extraordinary' clearly put

him on a different plane to 'normal' children and such dramatic language set the tone for the construction of the Victorian 'infant phenomenon' which is explored in the next section.

3.2 The Infant Phenomenon

Clearly, the public's appetite for remarkable children had been identified and it was arguably the musical prodigies of the eighteenth century who paved the way for the explosion of all manner of child performers in Victorian England, who consisted not only of 'prodigies' but also acrobats, singers, dancers and actors. Waters (1996), in her study of child performers in the early and mid-Victorian theatre notes three salient features of the stage child which still seem relevant today, namely; 'the emphasis on the marvellous, the publicity mongering and the parental shrewdness in exploiting a child's talent.' (Waters 1996:78).

Certainly all three elements apply to Master William Henry West Betty, the first child performer to really take London and the provinces by storm and who apparently engendered mass hysteria among his audiences. Although his career only lasted three years from his debut in Belfast in 1803 to his last in London in 1806 'Betty mania' provided much fodder for the press of the time, much as stories about child stars do now. There was even one famous occasion when the Prime Minister, Pitt, apparently adjourned the House of Commons so that members might be in time to see Betty's Hamlet. The boy star was said to have 'divided the world with Bonaparte' (Playfair 1967). On one side there was his royal patronage and idolisation by the masses who named him the 'Infant Roscius' and, on the other a more sceptical assessment of his talents by professional actors and actresses such as the indomitable Mrs Siddons who described him witheringly as: 'a very clever, pretty boy, but nothing more' (1874 quoted in Waters 1996:79).

In Betty's wake came a host of 'young wonders' or 'infant prodigies' including the Infant Hercules, whose gift seems clear from his name, and the more obscure Infant Candlesnuffer whose special talent can only be guessed at. One element however, attracted audiences like no other – 'naturalness', an attribute which characterised the romantic image of the child

which was gaining currency at this time through the work of poets and artists such as Wordsworth and Blake:

As far as one can judge, what attracted audiences to child performers was the apparent spontaneity of their performances; from Betty onwards, the search was for untaught, natural genius. (Waters 1996:86)

Ironically however, such 'natural genius', especially in the arenas of acrobatics and dance, was often the result of fierce rearing and training techniques. As Steedman (1995) notes in her study of Victorian street and stage child acrobats and contortionists:

The child-acrobat ...was used to articulate ideas about child nurture and cruel and improper parental treatment of children in the same way as chimney sweeps and factory children were. (Steedman 1995:16)

The harsh training techniques employed by parents or the stereotypically heartless showmen who bought children from their families were recorded in detail and immortalised in literature, fixing forever the image of the abused and exploited performing child in the collective psyche:

(he) beat her when she would not dance the rope, and starved her when she did to prevent her growth.
(Sir Walter Scott, *Peveiril of the Peak* 1820 quoted in Steedman 1995:16)

Lee: this here is my boy Johnny, and he's going to do a spring and jump onto my shoulder, and then turn a double somersault on the ground
Crowd: And what are you going to do with yourself?
Lee: Why, take the money!
(G.R Sims, *Master and Man. Play* 1889 quoted in Steedman 1995:16)

The mistreatment of such children also brought up difficult, and to this day still contentious, issues about the ownership of the child's body and the rights of the parent over the rights of the child. Did the child belong to the parent to do with as they wished? Or was the child an individual with rights to whom the state had a responsibility to protect? The shift towards the latter viewpoint had already begun in Victorian society with the establishment of the Education Act (1876) which rendered schooling compulsory for

children under 10 and the Factory Act (1833) which limited child labour. Lord Shaftesbury's last campaign to rescue child workers was the 'Children's Dangerous Performances Act of 1879' which outlawed putting a child under 14 through a performance that was likely to endanger life or limb.

However, the image of cruel parents submitting their underfed children to hours of torturous training in order to line their own pockets persisted even though the training of a child in a family craft was generally regarded as 'the epitome of symbiosis, trust and responsibility' in Victorian society (Steedman 1995:102). To be a performer was somehow already being cast as incongruous with being a 'proper' child with 'proper' parents.

Another common sight on Victorian streets were the Italian child street musicians whose poor Neapolitan families were paid a fixed sum for the services of their child by 'Padroni' with the assurance that their offspring would be clothed, fed and taught a musical instrument. These 'little slaves of the harp' (Zucchi 1999) were the subject of much scandal all over Europe and America, associated as they were with child prostitution and the white slave trade, and the evil Padrone 'was to become the stock-type of socio-fiction and campaigning melodrama.' (Steedman 1995:106). As far as the social reformers were concerned then the message was clear: child performers had to be protected from adults for their own safety.

And it was not only children who performed on the street who were objects of concern. Back in the theatre, a particularly successful infant prodigy was Jean Davenport whose father launched her career in the mid 1830s and who ensured she successfully appeared as six different characters in the same production - an incredible feat of stamina and confidence which it is thought Charles Dickens may have seen her perform (Waters 1996:81). Indeed it seems certain that Dickens' seminal depiction of the 'infant phenomenon' Ninetta Crummles in *Nicholas Nickleby*, who is kept forever little on a diet of gin and water, is based on Davenport. Dickens' tragic portrait of Crummles as quoted below, very much fed into subsequent social concerns about the welfare of performing children, as well as contributing to the emerging villainous image of the evil stage parent:

‘This, sir,’ said Mr Vincent Crummles, bringing the maiden forward, ‘this is the infant phenomenon – Miss Ninetta Crummles’...

‘May I ask how old she is?’ inquired Nicholas,

‘You may, sir,’ replied Mr Crummles.....‘she is ten years of age, sir.’.....

‘Dear me!’ said Nicholas, ‘it’s very extraordinary.’

It was; for the infant phenomenon, though of short stature, had a comparatively aged countenance, and had moreover been precisely the same age – not perhaps to the full extent of the memory of the oldest inhabitant, but certainly for five good years. But she had been kept up late every night, and put upon an unlimited allowance of gin-and-water since infancy, to prevent her growing tall, and perhaps this system of training had produced in the infant phenomenon these additional phenomena.

(Dickens *Nicholas Nickleby* 1838)

However, the earnest concerns of largely middle-class social reformers over the safety of child performers were somewhat overshadowed by the boom in the number of licensed theatres and the popularity of public entertainment in the mid-Victorian era. A large number of children worked in theatres at this time, particularly in pantomimes, and dancing and gymnastic displays. It seems that the pitiless treatment of child performers as recorded in literature, had become romanticised, perhaps even eroticised at this time. Indeed, a resonant stereotype of the child performer to emerge from this era was that of the ‘tears behind the make-up’, embodying the theatrical tradition that the show must go on, despite any disparities between the professional public image and private suffering. A reviewer in the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported the pathetic back-stage sight of:

the young gentleman in pink tights and spangles...his sallow cheeks smeared with rouge.’ (Pall Mall Gazette 30 March 1885)

and another asked: ‘what becomes of the elves and fairies...when the performance is over?’ (Pall Mall Gazette 9 February 1885)

Fears began to surface about the futures of these children that are still being voiced in reference to child performers today:

the evidence is that these unfortunates, if they do not get ruined entirely...never settle down to any industrial occupation.

(Bradlaugh 1889 quoted in Steedman 1995:106)

The reformers were clear as to their purpose; theatrical children had to be ‘rescued’ just as children working in factories and up chimneys had been. Ironically the stage performances of children dressed up as elves or fairies, endearingly cute, vulnerable and ‘childlike’ contributed to the wider process of the sacralisation of children in the late nineteenth century which fuelled reformers’ idealist visions of children and childhood, whereby as Zelitzer has described ‘having become economically useless to their families, children became emotionally priceless.’ (1981:1036). This confusion between the actual qualities of children and the qualities required of the ‘ideal’ child represented on stage/screen has long been, and continues to be, an underlying tension in relation to child performers.

Far from the ‘unnatural’ contortions of the street acrobats, the pantomime elves and fairies were much closer to the romantic ideal of childhood as a time of innocence, vulnerability and closeness to nature and as such they represented a new way of looking at children and conceptualising childhood. As mentioned above, the on-going obsession with ‘natural’ performances by children can be traced to this time. A reviewer of a production of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in 1889 makes this priority clear:

We must accord our tribute of praise to Miss Vera Beringer for the most natural child performance we have ever seen. (The Playgoer, London May 1889)

and another describing the performance of Minnie Terry in 1888:

this charmingly artless little maiden was conspicuously free from the precocious airs and graces that usually mar the pleasure to be derived from juvenile performers. (The Era 12 May 1888)

In tandem with this valuing of the natural qualities of children came worries as to the corrupting influence of theatrical training and life in the world of entertainment, themes which again, are very much relevant to contemporary child performers. Such was the degree of concern that a Parliamentary report was commissioned to investigate the ‘terrible knowingness’ of stage children which was euphemistically aligned to child sexuality and prostitution:

(child actors are taught) to accompany every word by studied gesture and look...and made to practise the various expressions of passions – pride, contempt, love, hatred, pleasure, etc – until each can be assumed at command. (British Parliamentary Papers, Third Report 1887 vol 30)

It was further claimed that all stage children had an ‘insatiable thirst for admiration’ and were used to being watched and seeing themselves ‘as objects of someone else’s contemplation.’ (ibid all quoted in Steedman 1995:136))

However, an illuminating article in *The Playgoer* from 1889 entitled ‘Children on the Stage’ presents a different point of view, claiming that the life of a stage child was preferable to alternative ways of making money thus comprehensively locating ‘child performer’ as a working class occupation. The description of poor children as ‘creatures’ who ‘infest’ the streets stands in stark contrast here to the ‘angels’ and ‘fairies’ of theatreland.

Few who knew anything of the lives of children engaged in theatrical performances will speak against it, for it is infinitely better that these little creatures should be put in the way of earning an honest livelihood, and be placed under the supervision of trustworthy people, than that they should spend their lives playing in the gutters of our wretched slums...Stage children are well paid, and their salaries must make a most beneficial difference to the home economy...it would be a blessed thing if all the poor little ones who infest our streets could obtain theatrical engagements. (L.S in *The Playgoer*, May 1889)

However, L.S moves on to less philanthropic ground and makes no attempt to disguise his contempt for the ‘unnatural’ stage child, when he asserts that:

The employment of children on the stage is excellent for children...but how about the audience?...a chorus sung by children, how shrill, tuneless and unpleasing, and last, but by no means least – in fact, by far the greatest infliction of all – the child actor or actress...Every attitude is the result of laborious study and practice....It is not the children on that stage that need our sympathy...it is the unfortunate playgoers doomed to sit out these pigmy efforts who are really deserving of commiseration. (ibid)

This association of child performers as low-grade, unsophisticated entertainment for the masses goes some way to explaining the decline in popularity of child wonders in the latter part of the nineteenth century. As standards of production, performance and dramatic composition rose so did the cultural influence of the middle-class audience and the cheap home-made spectacle of the infant prodigy was no longer either impressive or entertaining. For example, in the late 1850s, the critic Morley wrote a scathing account of the laboured meticulousness of the performances of Kate and Helen Bateman, aged six and eight:

(Who are) both pretty and clever, but whose appearance...is a nuisance by no means proportioned to the size of its perpetrators'. And he describes the 'wearisome absurdity of such big words in such small mouths. (Quoted in Waters 1996:90)

Marie Bancroft, who herself had been a child performer who remembered, 'only work and responsibility from a very tender age' wrote jubilantly, if not somewhat prematurely, in 1886 that the fashion for child prodigies was finally over, declaring portentously; 'Fortunate children, fortunate public!' (quoted in Waters 1996:89). That she was so very wrong demonstrates the seemingly insatiable public desire to be entertained by 'marvellous' children, coupled with a growing dissent for the practice of allowing children to perform in such a way – an uneasy dichotomy which has endured in relation to children who work in the entertainment industry.

From this account of child performers in the Victorian era then, several salient themes can be identified which still seem relevant to today's child stars and which indicate the incongruity of the category to the dominant discourse on childhood as a prolonged period of protected innocence which was emerging at the time. These are;

- tensions surrounding ownership of the child (does a child 'belong' to its parents, to the state or to itself?)
- the negative image of the parents/guardians of performing children (as cruel, self-seeking, greedy and so-on)
- the incongruity of being a performing child with being a 'normal' child (in much the same way as factory children were not 'normal' children)

- the perception of performing children as objects of pity and ridicule
- the perception of performing children as objects of hope and nostalgia
- the fundamental importance to the audience of a child's performance being 'natural'
- the uncomfortable association of performing children with child sexuality
- concerns over the moral welfare and future lives of performing children
- the identification of being a child performer as a working class profession

These conflicting views and attitudes towards child performers, and the cultural stereotypes of such children and the adults who were connected with them carried through into the twentieth century as child performers moved from the stage and street to the big screen and then onto television.

3.3 American Vaudeville

If English theatre had become, temporarily at least, somewhat too sophisticated for the child performer to reach the levels of success prodigies such as Betty and Davenport had previously achieved, it was a different story in America where cheap, sentimental, travelling entertainment was very much in demand. In the mid nineteenth century male dominated audiences at remote gold rush camps were reduced to tears (and generous financial gestures of appreciation) by all-singing, all-dancing dolls or 'fairy stars' who reminded them of the families they had left behind.

One famous such 'fairy star' was Lotta Crabtree (born 1847), the child of a miner and a very ambitious mother who saw in her tiny, copper haired daughter a way out of the isolation and privation of life in the remote town of Rabbit Creek. Encouraged by the way in which miners in the street would reach out just to touch the little girl's hand, 'drinking in the presence of this child who symbolised the home and family forsaken in their lonely quest for gold,' (Cary 1997:5), her mother Mary Ann devised a song and dance routine for Lotta which made the most of her childish exuberance and angelic appearance. Lotta's act was received with such adoration by the locals that Mary Ann set off with Lotta on a mule

wagon around America to take the show to the outermost camps where small communities of men 'starved for diversion and loaded with gold', welcomed them with open arms. Not surprisingly overwhelmed by the frightening strangeness of her surroundings Lotta often became deeply despondent just before a show and Mary Ann would apparently cajole and boost up the child by any means possible to ensure Lotta would perform well so that there would be plenty of coins thrown on stage at the end which Mary Ann could collect up in her apron. The perilous journeys involved in reaching outpost camps added to the young girl's sense of disorientation and anxiety and she told years later of 'waking one night as her mule picked his way along a thread of canyon trail to see, far ahead, a lone horse and rider plunge soundlessly over the edge into the purple mists below.' (Cary 1997:15)

Lotta went on to appear at 'bit' theatres, road shows and in melodeons (an early form of vaudeville) before becoming in her early teens 'Miss Lotta, the San Francisco Favourite', an irresistible confection of wicked innocence devised by Mary Ann with which she won large audiences in Boston and Chicago. In classic melodramatic fashion, Lotta still looked and acted like a child on stage at the age of thirty-five and her mother never let go of the iron grip she had on her daughter's life ensuring that Lotta remained fully dependent on her without a husband or close friends.

It is easy to see how Mary Ann became as famous for being the archetypal pushy parent as Lotta did for being the original fairy star of the gold rush camps. Ma Crabtree became a legend amongst American would be stage mothers and many admired her forthright determination in managing her daughter's career. Although the image of the stage mother has become a monstrous stereotyped inversion of the 'normal' parent/child relationship whereby the parent is seen to be using the child to fulfil their own financial and emotional needs, it is worth noting that women like Mary Ann Crabtree no doubt had to be fierce in order to protect their children in such a rough and ready environment as pioneering American theatre, especially as their livelihoods depended on their protégées remaining, or at least appearing, naïve and 'natural'.

Clearly the concept of the child as the property of his or her parents to be directed and manipulated without taking into consideration whether or not the child actually wished to

be a performer, was the dominant attitude towards such children at the time. It is understandable that given the harsh reality of life for poor immigrants in nineteenth century America a somewhat hard attitude to child rearing was part of the culture and that exploiting potential sources of income overrode the ideal of protecting children and childhood from the economic, adult world. Perhaps it is because it has always been the children of the poor who have worked in any capacity that being a child performer became so associated with being a working class profession and as such was distanced from burgeoning middle class ideals about the 'normal' role and place for children in their own separate world of childhood.

However, the next generation of child performers in American Vaudeville continued to exploit the sentimental ideal of childhood whilst living a life which was far removed from the sensibilities of the delicate children they represented. Performers such as Baby Gladys Smith (who later became Mary Pickford) and little Elsie Jones wrung all available emotion out of audiences with maudlin songs about love and loss whilst their mothers busied themselves ensuring their prodigy's success. Elsie Jones remembered the day in 1898 that she was offered a salary of \$125 a week by a Buffalo theatre owner and that from then on her cold mother found a new dedication to her child:

Mother marched head up, eyes front my hand in hers, her life in mine.
Men meant nothing to her unless they were interested in me, and if they
were not, it was unfortunate for them, as I was ever present. (Quoted in
Cary 1997:24)

The widespread misery caused by childhood death due to epidemics of scarlet fever and diphtheria in American cities at this time was also used to dramatic advantage on stage in a multitude of Dickens' inspired plays and the ubiquitous *Uncle Tom's Cabin* featuring child actresses such as Lillian Gish and Cordelia Howard. By presenting dying children as innocent babes, who were transformed into 'angel children, powerful intercessors before the heavenly throne for parents, brothers and sisters still caught in this vale of tears,' (Cary 1997:9), the performances of the child actors comforted and reassured their audiences. Indeed, according to Cary, the redemptive nature of Little Eva's death in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* altered the very position that theatre occupied in many god-fearing American towns:

(the) play also qualified as a genuine religious drama, thereby breaking the long-standing preacher's ban on 'Satan's Palace', as the faithful referred to the theatre. Attending a performance of Uncle Tom's Cabin became an obligation of conscience for thousands of devout Christians who had formerly shunned the proscenium as the very gate of Hell. (Cary 1997:10)

This power of the child performer to bring people together by symbolising hope and eliciting emotion was seized upon by the Hollywood movie makers in the early twentieth century who began to realise the fortunes that could be made by presenting the public with the right kinds of 'star'.

The popularity of Vaudeville entertainment in the early 1900s provided fertile ground for a huge variety of singing, dancing, contortionist and comedy acts to hone their skills all over America. *Variety* magazine which started in 1905 is an interesting source of information on such acts, yet children do not feature heavily in their reviews as regulations passed by the children's society at the turn of the century prevented many from performing at all. Indeed such was their scarcity on stage that the pull of one advert for a seasonal pantomime was 'real, live children, real, live monkeys' (Primary 23 advert *Variety*, Dec 1906). Perhaps this lack of 'real' children explains the appeal of the 'childlike' Eva Tanguay, arguably the most successful performer in vaudeville history:

'I want so much to be understood!' That little plea sums up all the childlike sincerity of Eva Tanguay. She likes, dislikes, is pleased and made happy; her heart is touched, by flashes – with the acute sensibilities of a child....It is this childlike appeal that has made Miss Tanguay nationally popular. The gleefulness, the half impudent assurance, the humour – each quality is distinctly childlike. Her costumes might easily be startling – but they never seem anything but delightfully comic. Miss Tanguay is a sort of girl-who-wouldn't-grow-up. She is Peter Pan in real life. (*Variety*, Jan 30 1915)

However, some child performers did slip through the net and travelled round the country as part of (usually family) vaudeville acts, and it was from this limited pool that the initial child cinema actors were selected. Interestingly, in the early days of cinema acting in films was considered by performers as the poor relation of treading the boards and those who did

act on camera were certainly not proud of it. For example, Mary Pickford, who went on to be America's first real movie star, initially only went looking for studio work because roles on Broadway had dried up for her and, in 1909 at the age of fourteen, she had outgrown her previous incarnation as baby Gladys on the Vaudeville circuit. Cary describes Pickford's success as due to her ability to connect with a wide audience and represent the all-American values which were beginning to characterise the era;

Mary personified youthful America on the threshold of a century of promise, peace and scientific progress. She was a spunky girl, someone that the immigrant, the country folk and the self-made man could all believe in. Obviously America and the girl who became America's sweetheart were born to win. (Cary 1997:35)

However, Pickford was also among the first to discover the lifelong repercussions of being a well known child actor on film, commenting when she finally retired that:

The little girl made me. I wasn't waiting for the little girl to kill me, I'd already been pigeonholed. (Quoted in Thomson 1995:585)

3.4 The Hollywood Child Star Era

Although, as demonstrated earlier, occasionally particularly talented or popular child performers had been recognised throughout the nineteenth century, the concept of the 'child star' in our modern understanding of the term was not viable until the age of cinema. Previous to this time the height of fame for a child (or any) performer would be to be featured in an article in a review publication such as *Interlude* in the UK or *Variety* in America. Such publicity would ensure a full house for the next performance and perhaps guarantee a run of bookings for the coming season. From the available evidence it appears that the quality of the performance was all that mattered – nobody was particularly fascinated with the actual child and his/her offstage life.

The child as a 'star' was something altogether different - an invention of the film industry, created, packaged and presented in order to delight audiences. Once the potential had been established for capturing on film those qualities of childhood which were perceived as

particularly endearing in the early twentieth century, all that was necessary was to find the children who embodied, or mimicked, such qualities more than most.

The seminal performance that sparked not just the beginning of the most successful child actor's career of all time, but which also started the phenomenon of the Child Star Era as characterised by personalised and obsessional tributes to an individual performer, was that of the six year old Jackie Coogan as a charming ragamuffin in *The Kid* (1919). Coogan was discovered by Charlie Chaplin, who was himself a former child performer in British vaudeville, and Cary describes the significant and symbolic moment when four year old Coogan, who had fallen asleep while Chaplin and his father discussed the terms of his contract, woke up to find himself:

in another world, where he, the hooper's son, had been transformed into a veritable angel child, complete with luminous spirituality and truly awesome redemptive powers. (Cary 1997:55)

The height of fame to which Coogan shot was unprecedented, indicating perhaps that American audiences were more than ready to embrace children (the cuter the better) as the new stars of the cinema:

Jack Coogan...has achieved cinemagraphic fame more suddenly and at a younger age, probably than any other screen player. (New York Times February 1921 quoted in Ryan 2000:17)

Coogan supported his entire family with the fortune he made from appearing in a dozen or more films and they lived a privileged lifestyle splitting their time between a ranch in California and a house in Hollywood. In a 1923 deal with Metro, Coogan received 64% of the profits from his films making him one of the highest earners in the US. However, with the onset of puberty Coogan's appeal diminished and although he made some films in his teens and early twenties they weren't very well received. Believing that a large portion of the money he had earned was in a trust fund to be accessed on his 21st birthday, Coogan was shocked to discover when the time came that the sum was actually just \$1000. He took his mother and her husband (his manager) to court and sued them for \$4 million. His mother claimed that she was entitled to everything Coogan had earned before he had

become an adult. He quoted his mother as saying: 'It's all mine and Arthur's and so far as we are concerned you'll never get a cent.' (quoted in Ryan 2000:24)

Eventually Coogan received just \$126000, and in 1939, his wife Betty Grable left him saying that they 'hoped to return to each other when his financial troubles were straightened out.' (quoted in Ryan 2000:25). Later that year what was to become known as 'Coogan's Law' was approved which stated that in future a child's earnings should belong to the child in order to protect young performers against parasitic parents or guardians.

Even though Coogan went on to have a fairly successful and long television career, re-marry and even have a reconciliation of sorts with his mother, he is still presented as a failure and a tragic figure in contemporary retrospectives:

(his) tragedy was that, throughout his life, he was defined by a part he played when he was just six years old. His only other career high point came in the 1960s when he played Uncle Fester in the cult TV show 'The Addams Family'. He once said: "I used to be the most beautiful child in the world and now I'm a hideous monster". (The Herald 22.11.02)

Coogan's unfortunate relationship with his parents and the subsequent well publicised legal battles that ensued may go some way to explaining why being a successful child (even an extraordinarily successful one) is automatically assumed to be a negative experience. The reporting of his troubles in the press and gossip columns set the precedent for reporting scandal in relation to former child stars because of the impact such stories carry, confounding as they do both expectations of 'normal' family life and childhoods and the image of perfection which the actor represented on screen as a child.

However, the huge success of *The Kid* and Coogan's immense childhood wealth inspired many American families to view their children as potential sources of fame and fortune. Many legendary child stars originated in this era, including Shirley Temple, Mickey Rooney, Freddie Bartholomew and Judy Garland. Diana Serra Cary, a former child star who became famous during the 1920s as Baby Peggy, explained the situation thus:

Although the child star business was a very new line to be in, it opened up a wide choice of jobs for many otherwise unskilled workers, and it grew with remarkable speed. Speed was, in fact, the name of the game. Parents, agents, producers, business managers, and a host of lesser hangers-on were all engaged in a desperate race to keep ahead of their meal ticket's inexorable march from cuddly infant to graceless adolescent. (Cary quoted in Price 2002:2)

The child had become a commodity again in an otherwise financially unproductive period of life. For the possibility of wealth and fame it seems, it was acceptable to disregard social conventions regarding education and schooling, the privacy of childhood and the place of the child as a dependent who is protected by the family. This is in stark contrast to the vision of 'the century of the child' which attracted reformers for most of the first half of the twentieth century. As Cunningham describes:

Their overriding aim was to map out a territory called 'childhood', and put in place frontier posts which would prevent too early escape from what was seen as desirably a garden of delight. Within this garden children would be cared for and would acquire the 'habit of happiness.' (Cunningham 1995:164)

Given this, the question then arises as to how the Hollywood machine was able to counteract the unsavoury image of buying and selling the cutest children to the highest bidder to work in an industry which had ostensibly no honour, tradition or responsibility. The answer appears to be by creating an image of the child star as totally unlike other children – as gifted, wise, with almost magical qualities – children who were 'too good' for a normal life, whose purpose was to bring joy and happiness to audiences (for example, 6 year old Margaret O'Brien was described in a 1943 *Photoplay* feature article as 'this amazing piece of humanity.'). Such children were 'angels' on screen and off, the child actor became the child on screen and vice versa, the removal of the child star from the category of 'normal' children had begun in earnest, and the greatest screen angel of all time was undoubtedly Shirley Temple.

The Great Depression was a boom time for the American film industry, representing as it did a form of escapism from the harsh realities of the daily lives of the audiences. Shirley Temple was the top box office attraction from 1935-38 and represented, for many, the

epitome of childhood goodness and sentiment, a beacon of hope for the future of America and the physical embodiment of the perfect child:

Her bouncing, blond curls, effervescence and impeccable charm were the basis for a Depression-era phenomenon. Portraying a doll-like model daughter, she helped ease the pain of audiences the world over. (Baseline Encyclopaedia of Film quoted in Price 2002:2)

Throughout her career, Temple always played the part of the redemptive child in films, providing comfort to flawed and corrupt, usually male, adults with her charm and naïve wisdom. For example in *Dimples* (1936), Temple plays a rough diamond in a gang of street urchins who takes the blame for a theft that was actually carried out by a wealthy, elderly Professor. His revelation of the 'true meaning' of goodness as taught him by Temple's selfless act is facilitated through her undemanding, simple demeanour and unconditional love for the old man. He calls her his 'little angel' and a 'remarkable child' and rescues her from the street to come and live with him in his opulent mansion. Temple is thus rewarded for her natural goodness and the old man has become a better person through his association with this 'angel child'.

The sexual undertones of Temple's films which often included her sitting on men's laps, touching their faces and being the object of their adoration and fascination make uncomfortable viewing today. However, they can be read as symptomatic of the way in which Temple was idolised at the time and elevated beyond the 'normal' parameters of childhood, whereby acceptable adult/child relations no longer applied. In effect within that construction of Temple as a perfect doll child, it was acceptable to see men fondle her because she was 'Shirley Temple' who belonged to everyone, whose role was simply to make people happy and whose distinctness from 'normal' children was part and parcel of her appeal. Indeed the strength of Temple's performances emanated from her ability to elicit emotional reactions from her audience who were content to sit through similar plots acted out again and again in various scenarios throughout the 1930s.

Interestingly Graham Greene, recently returned from Mexico, and watching Temple's films with fresh eyes, was less than impressed by her saccharine, studied performance.

Alleging in a review of *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937) that she was an ‘adult impersonating a child’ (quoted in Thomson 1995:743) Greene threatened the very fantasy of the real yet ideal child that Temple represented and the subsequent litigation bankrupted the magazine which carried his article. Clearly, in relation to child stars, only one kind of article was acceptable to the extremely powerful studio bosses – the kind which reinforced the image of the child which was presented on screen.

Photoplay magazine was one of several publications who were happy to bolster the manufactured profiles of all Hollywood stars, including children. In a feature article about ‘The Little Rascals’ (also referred to as ‘Our Gang’, a popular fictional group of scruffy yet endearing children who appeared in many films in the 1920s and 30s) it is clear that there is to be no division between where the child actor ends and the character he/she plays begins with Jackie Condon being presented as identical to the ‘rough’ character he played:

Jackie Condon of “Our Gang” is the tousled hair youngster who is always tagging along after any neighbourhood gang. He’s a sympathetic character and is always serious. A few months ago Warren Doane, general manager of the Hal Roach studios, was leaving for New York on a business trip:

“What shall I bring you Jackie?” he asked.

“Bring me a rabbit, a little live rabbit,” Jackie answered and then after some thought, added: “**And bring me a gun to shoot it with.**”

(Photoplay, May 1925)

The pressure on child actors to maintain the image created for them by the studios proved too much for many to bear. Judy Garland is a classic example of someone who experienced a much happier childhood in print than in reality. After all how could Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) be anything but carefree and innocent? Who would have believed she was desperately unhappy, addicted to the diet pills and amphetamines supplied by the studio and denied access to the education which may have provided her with some sense of self worth?

Freddie Bartholomew (born 1924) is another example of a child star whose real life experiences were in stark contrast to his poised and graceful film persona, most critically

acclaimed when he played Little Lord Fauntleroy in 1936. Having been abandoned by his over-burdened mother when he was a toddler and looked after by his Aunt Myllicent who later took him to America, Freddie went on to achieve an outstandingly successful and lucrative career as a child star. The subsequent reappearance of his long lost parents and the battles over money and ownership of the child which followed must have been utterly bewildering for the young actor. The mercenary Mrs Bartholomew debarked at New York claiming that her new found interest in her son was due solely to motherly love and that she was truly unconcerned with the financial gain such a close bond might engender:

My visit here is not actuated from a monetary standpoint, nor do I wish to deprive his Aunt Myllicent of any of the rightful and proper benefits which may accrue to her as a result of his success. I do not desire to embarrass my boy's career, but feel that his love and affection should not be weaned away from his parents. (Lillian Mae Bartholomew 8th April 1936 quoted in Zierold 1965:181)

Unfortunately for Freddie however, it seemed that motherly love did come at a price and by the time he was fifteen he had been in and out of court an average of twice a month since arriving in America in 1934. Having had to pay so many lawyers' fees and having had to share out his earnings amongst his aunt, mother, father, grandparents and even his sisters who had initially not even believed that the juvenile movie star was their brother, Freddie ended up with little to show for his early film success and was certainly not living the privileged life of an upper class youth as he was so often depicted as on screen and in the media.

The conflation of fantasy and reality regarding the lives of actors and actresses which was (and to some extent still is) perpetrated by the Hollywood film industry in order to create the 'star system' was a vital ingredient in the further separation between the child star and the 'normal' child in the early to mid twentieth century. However, when horror stories such as Garland's and Bartholomew's became public knowledge, child stars became a much more complicated phenomenon than the Hollywood star machine ever wanted them to be. Rather than simply being living embodiments of perfect children, child stars had become cultural icons of both hope and sadness. They were the stars who represented everything people wanted their children to be in terms of their on-screen appearance and

behaviour, and yet nothing they wanted their children to be, at the same time. Once again the tensions surrounding child performers emanating from Victorian times seemed to be in evidence as issues of ownership, ‘normality’ and concerns over the moral welfare of the child came into play, along with the ubiquitous stereotype of the pushy parent of the crowd-pleasing child who is both adored and pitied.

3.5 Child Stars on Television

The studio system, and with it the classic Child Star Era, began to crumble in the 1940s when the improbability of a child like Shirley Temple solving adult problems no longer seemed acceptable to a war hardened audience. Coupled with the growing popularity and affordability of television and the post war focus on domestic life and consumerism, the scene was set for a new kind of child star who was more kid next door than angel, and by the 1950s child actors had become part of the cultural landscape once again in America. This time they were part of solidly middle class, two parent nuclear families in sitcoms such as *Leave it to Beaver* and *Ozzie and Harriet*. The stereotypical gender roles of mom and dad (often comically inverted) and the ‘cute but cheeky’ kids reinforced old-fashioned values of family cohesion and togetherness which characterised post-war American idealism:

They were wholesome, clean-cut, Wonder Bread kids who were living the American dream as much as they were creating it, week in and week out, on their beyond reproach TV series. (Ryan 2000:55)

A different set of criteria was used in their selection, and a new context was provided for their performances, and yet once again the overriding demand was for child actors who could be ‘natural’:

to be a successful kid star of TV’s Golden Era you had to look and sound natural. Even if your lines were scripted. Even if your days were produced. Even if your lives were anything but. You had to be natural. Naturally. (Ryan 2000:39)

Andrea Darvi, herself a child star of the 1960s describes the ruthless casting and audition processes which ensured the right children, from the many, many hopefuls, were chosen for the right parts on TV shows and adverts in America. She explains how most agencies adhered to the motto 'in at six, out at ten' due to the superior selling power of children in that age range who are generally old enough to read scripts and yet are still far away from the dreaded adolescence. However, what was even more important than chronological age was being small, being able to follow directions and fitting the physical specification of the role, which was usually a WASPy all-American blond child, but sometimes a Mexican waif or a 'street-wise' kid from the ghetto. Whatever the appearance of the child though the 'type' had to be the same:

fresh, innocent, the inexperienced kid untainted by overexposure, either by success or failure... [Directors] say "Send us a real kid, not a Hollywood kid." (Darvi 1983:79)

Ironically however, the behaviour demanded of such 'real' kids was of a truly professional standard. As Iris Burton, a powerful children's agent of that time put it:

You have to give them today's kid, one who can get out, put in eight hours of work, know his lines, not be restless on the set, and behave like a professional. (Quoted in Darvi 1983:73)

Even if a child fulfilled all of the casting directors conflicting criteria and landed a coveted well-paid part in a sit-com or TV drama, the clock was always ticking on the longevity of their suitability for the role. Darvi describes how painful it was when her acting career came to an end at the relatively advanced age of sixteen:

My specialness faded as quickly and inexplicably as it had arrived. I was nothing more I had been led to believe than the sum total of my roles, and as they became fragments of an ever-distant past, my present became ever more inconsequential. My life seemed as empty and meaningless as a blank television screen after the last credit has rolled by. (Darvi 1983:197)

Although the majority of former child stars from the 1960s managed to find alternative careers as adults often within the entertainment industry as agents or directors themselves¹ and a few were even able to continue acting, others found it extremely hard to accept that the most successful and lucrative period of their life was very probably behind them.

This may explain why many golden child stars of 1950s and 60s American television shows ended up involved in drugs and crime in later life, further contributing to the received wisdom that 'too much too young' is never a good thing and providing evidence for the enduring myth that somehow child stars are 'cursed'. For example, Tommy Reitig who had been the original dog's best friend in *Lassie* for several years (until he was replaced by a younger actor) ended up making headlines in 1975 as he was sent to prison for five years for dealing cocaine:

LASSIE'S FIRST MASTER ACCUSED OF COCAINE KARMA
(Village Voice 1975 quoted in Ryan 2000:85)

A few other examples (although there are many more) are Danny Bonaduce from *The Partridge Family* who was arrested and charged for drugs related offences several times throughout the 1980s, Mackenzie Phillips, star of *One Day at a Time* who nearly died twice from overdoses and Anissa Jones, 'Little Buffy' in *Family Affair*, who was found dead in a friend's pool house in 1976 aged 18 from 'one of the most severe cases of drug overdose ever seen in San Diego County' (Coroner Creason quoted in Ryan 2000:77). Trent Lehman the '100% real boy' from *Nanny and the Professor*, a show which one TV guide had described as a 'half hour bit of fluff', ended up hanging himself with a leather belt from a chain mail fence in 1982 aged 20 after failing to find work after he was let go from the show for getting too big. As his agent commented pragmatically:

Sometimes the older kids have trouble finding work. The little kids are cuter. (Quoted in Ryan 2000:90)

¹ For example Ron Howard (born 1954) who as a child and teenager starred in the long running US comedy *Happy Days* for nearly a decade and went on as an adult to direct many successful films.

Similarly, Rusty Hamer who became a huge star when he was seven in *Make Room for Daddy* and was described by an adult co-star as, 'the best boy actor I ever saw in my life', also failed to make it as an adult actor. In 1966 at age nineteen he nearly died after shooting himself in the stomach and then at age 42 he succeeded in killing himself with a .357 Magnum.

The child stars of TV shows in the 1970s and 80s didn't seem to fare much better and the public appetite for a juicy 'child star turned bad' story seemed to be insatiable. The most famous troubled kids were the stars of the inter-racial American sit-com 'Diff'rent Strokes', Gary Coleman, Dana Plato and Todd Bridges who ended up respectively as a national laughing stock, dead of a drugs overdose and in prison for selling crack cocaine.

In the UK as well the child star became a popular TV curiosity, with the singers Lena Zavaroni and Bonnie Langford having their own prime time show in the 1970s after having made it big on Huey Green's *Opportunity Knocks*. Zavaroni's emaciated adolescent body dressed up in little girl bows and frills makes extraordinarily uncomfortable viewing in retrospect, and her premature death from anorexia nervosa in 1998 renders her as yet another tragic casualty of the supposed 'curse' of the child star. It doesn't always end in tears of course. For example, Aled Jones the choir boy with the beautiful voice who shot to fame in 1983 with *Walking in the Air* has gone on to have a successful career as a television presenter and simply regards his early fame as an amusing and slightly embarrassing experience.²

The music industry in America too has produced its fair share of child stars since the 1960s, the most infamous being Michael Jackson who was born in 1958 and had his first hit with his brothers (The Jackson Five) in 1969 with *I Want You Back*. Jackson's solo career began in 1972 and he enjoyed stratospheric success into adulthood with albums such as *Thriller* (1982) selling more than 50 million copies. However, his personal life and appearance became more and more bizarre over the years, culminating in a well publicised court case in 2005 in which he was accused, and later found innocent of, sexually abusing

² Charlotte Church is another UK singer who became famous as a child and who will be discussed at length in a later chapter.

the young boys who he often had to stay over at his Neverland ranch. Jackson justified his unusual lifestyle by claiming he preferred the company of children to adults and that he considered himself to be a Peter Pan character – the boy who never grew up. The temptation to connect Jackson’s ‘idiosyncrasies’ with his early stardom, which seems to have been driven by a particularly abusive style of parenting, is difficult to resist and the overriding consensus on Jackson’s oddness is that it is due to him not having had a ‘normal’ childhood.

The link between early success in the entertainment world and future unhappiness as an adult had been well and truly established by the press by the 1970s and the thrilling shock value of such stories of despair and disappointment has ensured their continuing presence as a stock newspaper narrative ever since. The reconstruction of the child star as an object of pity and ridicule in the late twentieth century can be seen to have its antecedents both in the depiction of poor Victorian stage children and street performers with pushy parents and unscrupulous managers, and in the casting of adorable child actors as objects of poetic misery and suffering (who always somehow pull through due to their ability to melt adults’ hearts) in Hollywood movies of the Child Star Era. That there is an erotic element to the ‘punishment’ of the ‘naughty’ child star who has not been as good as gold or, perversely, has tried too hard to please, appears to be a plausible explanation for the endurance of this image and the fact that child stars occupy a position which has a cultural significance beyond their performances seems certain.

3.6 Later Child Stars of the Cinema

Whereas the children on the small screen were designed to embody wholesome family values and deliver cute ‘kids’ wisdom’, those on the big screen seemed to be fulfilling a different role entirely. The popularity of films in the 1970s featuring ‘demonic’ children has been interpreted as a reaction to the wholesome image of TV kids from the 1950s and 60s as well as an expression of fears about the breakdown of the nuclear family and permissive styles of parenting (Hogan 1997). Films such as *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Omen* (1976) and *Poltergeist* (1982), all dealt with murderously possessed children who completely inverted the saccharine sweet child stars of earlier eras. Child actors in the

1970s also became associated with something even more horrifying than violence - sex. Brooke Shields and Jodie Foster caused a moral outrage in middle America by playing teen prostitutes in, respectively *Pretty Baby* (1978) and *Taxi Driver* (1976) and Tatum O'Neal shocked audiences by exhibiting sexual awareness and swearing in *The Bad News Bears* (1976) and *Little Darlings* (1980). However, the very fact that children acting out scenes of violence and sex were greeted with such fascinated awe and controversy only served to reinforce the shared public consensus as to appropriate behaviour and boundaries for children and childhood. Far from heralding a new era of emancipated children such films simply inverted expectations of children on screen for the shock value. Later films such as *Kids* (1995) and *City of God* (2002) which focused on the harsh reality of the lives of 'real' children living chaotic and violent lives due to the breakdown of the social order have often failed to achieve the same levels of mainstream commercial success, suggesting that the role of children in cinema is to reinforce certain images of childhood and not others.

However, even though the image of the innocent child star had apparently passed its sell by date by the 1970s, the 1980s and 1990s brought a new wave of wonder children who continued to bring an air of purity and goodness to the cinema, albeit in a more knowing style than the starlets from the 1920s and 30s.

For example, Drew Barrymore's role as the wide-eyed, adorable Gertie in Spielberg's *E.T* (1981) at the age of six, catapulted her to child stardom, and she later described making the film as the best time of her life. Unfortunately, the rest of Barrymore's childhood descended into chaos as she became heavily involved in alcohol and drugs until at thirteen she was admitted to a rehabilitation centre. Her autobiography which was written at the age of fourteen (as only a child star's can be) is a painfully honest account of the confusion she felt as a child and the disparity between the comforting experience of being part of a 'family' on film sets, only to be an outsider in her own dysfunctional family and a stranger to her peers at school. As she puts it:

I've always grappled with the clash of image versus reality. The public saw me as Drew Barrymore, movie star, while I viewed myself quite differently – as a sad, lonely and unattractive girl with not much to her

advantage...I wanted to shout “Hey, I didn’t want to be famous. I just want to be loved.” (Barrymore 1990:6)

Barrymore’s complicated relationship with her parents surely didn’t help this low self-esteem as her mother, a failed actress, was determined to have her moment in the spotlight on the back of Drew’s success even if that meant taking her child to nightclubs and parties from the age of seven, and her father, the actor John Barrymore, himself an alcoholic-addict, would appear periodically in Drew’s life demanding money.

Given these elements of neglect and self-destruction, Barrymore’s story fitted neatly into the tradition of ‘child star gone bad’ media exposés which started in the 1960s and 70s, and yet also resonates with the pathos of Victorian depictions of child performers whose value is seen as solely economic and whose personal happiness is of no particular concern to the adults around them. That Drew managed to recover from her addictions and went on to have a successful adult career in film, is testament to her ability as an actress and the clever way in which she reinvented herself as an adult version of her childhood screen persona by playing kooky comedic parts in light-weight ‘feel-good’ movies.

However, the most famous child star of the 1980s was Macaulay Culkin, the nine year old star of the Home Alone movies, who was the very incarnation of the superior, redemptive child. His ‘natural goodness’ stood in sharp relief to the greed and ignorance of the criminal adults he managed to outwit in the films, having been literally (if accidentally) abandoned by his parents. The disordered family life and private miseries behind Culkin’s trademark boyish grin were not to become public until the inevitable fall from grace of the young actor as he became an awkward adolescent and the film roles dried up. The fact that in 2005 Culkin was called as both a witness for the defence and the prosecution in the Michael Jackson child abuse court case goes some way to indicate the strangeness of Culkin’s childhood and his subsequent life, let alone those of Jackson himself.

At the time of writing, two of the most successful child stars in America are Haley Joel Osment and Dakota Fanning both of whom with their frail fair bodies and huge, innocent eyes, represent the supernatural goodness of children as foils to the corruption of adults in a

much more sophisticated way than Culkin had done a decade earlier. Osment (born 1988) has been described as the best young actor of his generation due to his sensitive portrayals in films such as *The Sixth Sense* (1999) in which he played a child with the gift of being able to see dead people and *A.I* (2001) in which he was the robot child who taught his human mother the 'real' meaning of love. Clearly mindful of the time limit of his appeal as redemptive child on screen, Osment had one eye on the future when he commented that:

For me it's most important to find the films that will last....choice is the most important thing because I'm going to be an adult actor pretty soon. So I've got to be choosing the right roles now so that by the time I get to that age there will be wide options available. (Osment 2002 quoted in Haley Joel Osment biography www.imdb.com)

Dakota Fanning (born 1994) whose extensive credits include playing a troubled alien in *Taken* (2002) and the daughter of a mentally retarded man in *I Am Sam* (2001) a performance for which she became, at eight, the youngest person ever to be nominated for a Screen Actors Guild Award, is also evidently aware of the dangers of being stigmatised as a child star, claiming;

I'm just a normal kid, really. I just love to act. (Fanning 2005 quoted in Dakota Fanning biography www.imdb.com)

However, the fact that her roles and the level of her success consistently portray her as anything but 'normal' may make her early identity as an extraordinary child somewhat hard to escape.

And currently in the UK we have Daniel Radcliffe (born 1989) starring as Harry Potter in the filmic versions of the phenomenally successful children's novels by J.K.Rowling. In the best wonder-child tradition Harry is truly heroic and naturally superior to adults due to his innate sense of right and wrong, his loyalty to his friends, common sense, courage and sense of duty – real attributes in an increasingly secular, individualistic and materialistic society. Even though the fictional Harry was brought up in a cruel and unloving environment he is caring and good, reflecting the concept of destiny, that you are what you are with or without the love and encouragement you deserve. In this sense, Harry

represents the romantic ideal of the natural goodness of the child, born without sin to be tested and tempted by the cruel world of adults. Again and again it seems, despite political and social changes, films starring children carry the message that the child makes a better adult and the child star can't help but be caught up in the expectation of perfection. As for the actors in the Harry Potter films, time will tell whether or not they will live to regret their early success or be grateful for it. Either way, it will almost certainly have been a life, and identity, altering experience

Recent years have also seen the emergence of a new breed of child star; the media-savvy 'child-adults' who seem unconcerned about the potential pitfalls of early success due to the control they have over their professional and financial lives. The most extreme example of this is the incredible success of the Olsen Twins (born 1986) who have been appearing in US sitcoms, kids shows and films since they were babies and who were titled 'executive producers' of their own entertainment company, *Dualstar Inc*, at the age of seven. By the time they were thirteen Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen had earned more than Macaulay Culkin and Shirley Temple combined and had saved and invested prudently with the help of their parents and a trusted circle of lawyers and managers. Having launched a huge range of products on the back of their TV personas including internet sites, dolls, DVDs, CD-ROMs, books, posters, clothing, make-up and accessories the girls' appeal seemed to lie both in their familiarity (they had after all grown up on television) and their innocent prettiness which made them acceptable role models for pre-teens the world over. The quirkiness of being identical twins also gave them novelty value and especially appealed to the common little girl fantasy of always having a best friend to play with and confide in. Michael Stone, the chairman of the company which produced the girls' clothing line sums up their continuing success in starkly clinical terms, encapsulating the way in which child stars always seem to end up being reduced to a commodity no matter how 'natural' their appeal seems to be:

For an entertainment property to be successful over the long term, we believe it has to consistently deliver a fantasy to the core audience. Mary-Kate and Ashley fulfil for girls the fantasy. Girls want to be like Mary-Kate and Ashley. (Stone quoted in LA Times 30.01.00)

A journalist writing in 2000 when the girls were thirteen commented that despite their impressive confidence and success 'Mary-Kate and Ashley probably won't understand fame's impact on their lives until they're adults' (Ramsay LA Times 30.01.00) and given the tone of Stone's assessment of the twins as an 'entertainment property' it does seem unlikely that, even if they wanted to, they would ever be able to disassociate themselves with the brand-name they have become.

At the time of writing the twins are eighteen and have continued to deliver, on screen at least, the fantasy image of perfection that made them so popular with young girls, and in 2005 they took full control of their billion dollar media empire. However, Mary-Kate's well-publicised battle with anorexia and alcohol over the last few years has somewhat sullied the wholesome girls-next-door image which was so fundamental to their initial appeal. It seems that the pressure of having to live up to early success is one element of child stardom which no amount of media-savviness, protective parenting or prudent financial investment can avoid, and that the thought of growing up and away from a childhood image that has defined you can be a very frightening prospect indeed.

The fact that the Olsen twins were packaged and marketed to appeal to children rather than grown-ups sets them rather apart from other child stars whose main audience has traditionally been the amused or moved indulgent adult. That children are now a consumer group in their own right with money to spend on merchandise which connects them to the products and people they like (or at least the pester power to get their parents to buy it for them) probably explains the new breed of child star who is in effect 'from the children, for the children'. However, this shift in audience demographic for some child stars is more an extension of their appeal than a reduction of it. Child stars will always be required whenever there is a need for an idealised image of childhood to be represented on screen, whether that be an adult's ideal of what children should be like or a child's ideal of what they aspire to be like.

3.7 Always Different, Always the Same

This chapter has traced the history of children in the entertainment business from the earliest recorded references to child actors in antiquity, through street, stage and screen performers, up to today's multi-media, globally marketed child stars of film and television. I have described how social concerns over children working as acrobats and actors in Victorian times coupled with a growing literary tradition of depicting such children as tragic characters and the adults responsible for them as monsters, set in place stereotypes which endure to this day. The way in which Hollywood redefined the child performer as the child star in the early twentieth century by drawing on romantic ideals of special children having angelic qualities was also demonstrated to be an enduring theme in the contemporary appeal of children on screen.

The connection between Elizabethan boy actors, Victorian infant prodigies and contemporary child film actors may seem tenuous on one level, but the similarities are also staggering. The overwhelming importance of pleasing an audience, the coercion of some adults and the concern of others all seem to characterise the experience of being a child performer and always have done. The controversial nature of the term 'child star' derives from this very polarity of opinion regarding the acceptability of putting a child in front of an audience and allowing judgements to be made on both their performance and their moral character.

Even given these similarities though, it is undeniable that the role of the child performer changed profoundly over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from small actor to screen angel. The classic child star was thus born from the seemingly perfect marriage of Victorian infant prodigies and Vaudeville fairy dolls with the Hollywood star system. The way the child star was reconstructed again for the television age, again for more recent cinematic roles and yet again to provide lucrative role models for children, demonstrates the malleability of the subject and the on-going demand for child performers in a variety of guises.

The inherent 'differentness' of the performing child from the majority of children, especially in terms of the contradictory association both with precocious sexuality and with innocence and naturalness, underpins and highlights the extreme reactions which child stars seem to elicit.

3.8 Conclusion

As emphasised at the start of this chapter, the child star, or even simply the child performer, has never been a neutral category and the frequent oscillations between adoration and denigration in public attitudes towards them seem to be inconsistent and unpredictable. What does appear to be consistent, however, is the constant objectification and manipulation of the performing child to fulfil adult desires. The consumer of the child defines the child – as true now as it was in Ancient Greece and Elizabethan England.

The following chapter outlines the Methodology for the analysis which follows in which both the constructed nature of the child star and its universal appeal are explored.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Background to the Present Study

The original intention for this research was not that it would be about child stars. My preliminary idea was that I would explore the relationship between popular culture and the way that children construct their identities by, for example, talking about television, incorporating cartoon characters into their play and stories, copying the behaviour and language of pop stars and how they may or may not use shared culture to enhance alignment with their peer groups. As a primary school teacher I had become interested in how important popular culture seemed to be in the talk of children and their acceptance into certain friendship groups and wanted to try to analyse the processes by which this occurred.

With these general objectives in mind, I conducted a focus group pilot study with a group of young girls (seven to eight years) in which we watched a popular children's programme together and I asked them their opinion of it. We then had an informal discussion whereby I asked them about their favourite shows and what kind of games they played and what they enjoyed doing both at school and in their free time.

When analysing the transcribed tape it became apparent to me that although some interesting themes arose and the interaction between the girls was fascinating, it would be almost impossible to draw any theoretical conclusions about which cultural products influenced which elements of the identity of which individual. The project was just too ambitious and given the nebulous nature of 'culture' almost impossible to define. I also found that children as research subjects bring their own challenges too. For example, children don't just watch children's programmes, children sometimes pretend to have seen things that perhaps they haven't, some children say what they think an adult wants them to say and others deliberately try to shock and most children aren't at all interested in being consistent or reflecting on what they have seen or done.

Although I don't think the problems were insurmountable and that a narrowing down of the research question or a more naturalised setting for the data collection may well have been

the way forward, my feeling was that the project wasn't going to work in the way that I had envisaged and that I had to rethink what I wanted to achieve. Going back over the focus group data I became particularly interested in the responses and behaviour of one of the children in the group who was certainly the dominant, if not the oldest, participant.

This child was very interested in performing and frequently mentioned that she attended drama school on Sundays and in the school holidays where she learned singing, dancing and acting. Her confidence and attention seeking tactics rendered her the focus of the other children who seemed somewhat in awe of her. Whether this child's pretentious persona was a consequence of her drama school training or whether it was her natural disposition which made her so suited to performance activities was hard to discern and yet there was a definite difference between her and the other girls. Her confidence in herself and her abilities made me think about the children who actually appear on television and who make their careers in show business and consider questions such as; What is so special about certain children which makes others want to watch them perform? What impact does being a child performer have on 'normal' childhood activities and friendships? and How do parents justify allowing their children to become public property?

It became apparent that taking the child star as the object of enquiry for my project would not only condense the field of research to a more manageable size, it would also provide an opportunity to generate theory from a study of a specific, unique group of children.

Furthermore, the fact that such children are mere images to their audience and exist in the public sphere only as products of the media actually renders them as potentially the ultimate example of the relationship between childhood identity and popular culture which I was initially interested in. With this in mind I started to think about ways in which I could explore the constructed nature of the image of the child star whilst also taking into account the impact on an individual's identity which child stardom was likely to have.

The more I found out through reading biographies and autobiographies and searching newspaper archives for stories about child stars, the more intrigued I became, not only in the experiences of child stars and former child stars but also in the social history of

performing children, the controversy which has always surrounded them and the way in which they have always seemed to signify something larger than their small selves could justify.

I also realised that rather than simply serving as background reading to a project that might involve some in-depth interviews with former child stars or focus groups of children who attend stage school, the texts I was reading about child stars were actually valuable data in themselves. It became clear that it was within the press that the child star was created and destroyed and it was in the autobiographies and interviews that former child stars struggled to justify their experiences and re-claim their authenticity as adults. Not only would textual analysis of secondary data allow me access to more subjects than I could ever hope to contact personally, but given access to newspaper archives it was also possible to add a historical element to the analysis which would allow a tracing of attitudes towards and discourses surrounding child stars and popular culture which would be invaluable in contextualising our current construction of the child star.

Before embarking on the current project my knowledge of and curiosity about child stars was, like most people's, extremely limited. I had a vague recollection of child actors on shows I had liked as a child such as *Diff'rent Strokes*, and had heard a few shocking stories about the fates of former child stars such as River Phoenix and Lena Zavoroni who met untimely, grisly ends but gave them no more thought than that. In pop culture, it seems, child stars are the ultimate bubble gum product – used, enjoyed and spat out when they lose their flavour. Forever replaceable, eminently forgettable and ultimately irrelevant to their audiences' lives and concerns. Child stars seem to have always occupied a position just below the eye-line of reality, as soon as they are focused on they are gone, grown up and away into awkward adolescence.

However for performers who merely flit in and out of our popular culture they seem to generate enormous press interest in their experiences both as children and as adults which seems somewhat disproportionate to their contribution to the entertainment world. When I started looking for newspaper stories about child stars and former child stars it became apparent that this was a group who people wanted to read about, to know about, to gloat

over and often to castigate as deviant. It seemed that the child star carried a significance that went beyond the career of the individual, and that the juxtaposition of the child in the adult dominated entertainment industry opened up a whole network of interesting avenues of exploration relating to attitudes towards childhood and children which may otherwise be too oblique to analyse. That these children occupy a position in public life and are well known outside of their own families and communities renders them if not unique, then a very select group and one which, I would argue, challenge certain key assumptions that we take for granted regarding the proper place and position of children in our society.

As noted in the literature review there have been no published academic studies of child stardom in the annals of social and cultural research – a state of affairs which can be viewed as both a positive and a negative in relation to the current study. On one hand the investigation of virgin sociological territory gives rather free rein to the methodological approach adopted by this research project, but less happily, on the other hand it renders the study vulnerable to all the errors of judgement, false starts and fruitless avenues of inquiry that are possible to be made.

Indeed, the child star as an object of enquiry is potentially open to as many different research approaches as there are unanswered questions. For example, one could collect statistical data to find out how many former child stars have an adult career in show business, or conduct an ethnomethodological study of child actors on a film set to assess their social competence, or run focus groups of children who attend stage school and compare their self representations to children who attend regular school, or conduct a questionnaire based attitude survey on whether or not children should be allowed to work in the entertainment industry – the list of potential avenues of sociological enquiry seems almost limitless, let alone the myriad psychological investigations into the effects of child stardom on an individual's family and peer relationships which could be undertaken.

None of the above approaches, however, would have been appropriate for examining the role of the media in constructing identities and the relationship between childhood and the media more generally, themes which I was particularly interested in exploring.

Therefore, the methodology was designed to address the following three objectives which constitute the central themes of the project:

1. To understand why our society demands and produces child stars and to explore the historical antecedents to our current construction of the child star.
2. To understand why child stars are presented in a particular way in the press and to relate this to a wider consideration of how all children whose experiences fall outside of the 'normal' sphere are dealt with on a cultural level.
3. To challenge the limitations of the social constructivist paradigm of research which currently dominates the Sociology of Childhood and to explore the usefulness of a structuralist approach to contextualising and explaining the status of children in our society with particular reference to the child star.

All three aims emanated from observations of the strangeness of public reactions to the child star in the press and in popular culture and of the incongruity of the working, famous child to our dominant ideals about childhood as a protected, sacred time of life. In an age of supposed homogeneity in both our construction of and expectations of children and childhood this highly visible little group seemed to be an anomaly which merited attention and demanded explanation.

The next section explains the Methodology for this study in light of the objectives outlined above.

4.2 A Dual Approach to Data Analysis

As noted above, one of the central aims of this project is to demonstrate the potential limitations of a purely social constructivist approach to understanding how childhood is given meaning in our culture. As discussed in the literature review, social constructivism has been the dominant paradigm in the sociology of childhood for the past two decades and has been invaluable in demonstrating the culturally defined nature of childhood. Focussing

on the experience of the child, rather than on institutional and professional voices which speak for the child, the movement has sought to understand how children are active participants in creating their own social worlds. Using methodologies such as ethnomethodology and conversation analysis many studies have demonstrated the way that children achieve social competence (e.g. Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998). Another methodology employed by social constructivism has been discourse analysis which has illuminated the way in which a certain Western discourse on childhood whereby the child is joyful, innocent, under adult control and inhabits a separate sphere of childhood, has become dominant over the last two hundred years (e.g. Hendrick 1990). This discourse can be understood as emanating from the fields of developmental psychology, educational reform and social welfare which characterised progress in the twentieth century, as well as inheriting a specific romantic image of the child as possessing preternatural wisdom and beauty from the artists and writers of the eighteenth century. That 'the child' is a socially constructed category is not under debate in this research. Indeed, discourse analysis is an unparalleled method of understanding the way in which disparate social groups become homogenous subjects and therefore will be used as a method of deconstructing the category of the 'child star' in the proceeding analysis.

However, it also became apparent through re-readings of the data that a purely social constructivist approach was not going to be sufficient to tell the whole story of the child star. The way that the stories in the data set were structured and the language used in their presentation seemed to go beyond the discourses which informed them. The similarity of some of the narratives to fairytales and the characterisation of the child star as an other-worldly being were themes that could not satisfactorily be explained by reference to the text alone. It seemed possible that there was another dimension to the significance of child stars, and perhaps to childhood in general, which was universal rather than socially specific and which referred to a greater shared system of meaning than a social constructivist reading would allow.

Therefore, in order to explore the child star as a product of the duality of childhood as both a socially specific and a universal phenomenon the data analysis is divided into two chapters; the first uses discourse analysis to investigate how the social category of 'child

star' is constructed and how it functions to create subject positions for the members of this group, and the second employs a broadly structuralist perspective in order to address the way that media stories about child stars are structured to create meaning and to explore how they relate to narrative themes emanating from myths and fairytales.

Although these two approaches are not mutually exclusive and there is necessarily some overlap in the findings, it is hoped that looking at the data from both these angles illuminates the child star more comprehensively than a narrower research focus would allow.

The following two sections take each of these approaches to the data in turn and explain the rationale behind the choice of research methods in relation to the aims of the study and the nature of the data available, as well as describing how the data analysis was carried out.

4.3 Discourse Analysis

4.3.1 A Theoretical Background

The idea that the aim of any research in the natural or social sciences is to uncover the 'truth' and find the essential underlying order to the world which characterised the project of modernity has been comprehensively dismantled by the postmodern thinkers of the late twentieth century (eg Lyotard, 1984, Baudrillard 1983, Lash 2001). Rather than moving steadily towards rationality and centralised power, society is understood in postmodern terms as fragmented with a decentring of power and many competing accounts of 'reality' vying for dominance in a social order which is reproduced and constituted by signs. One of the overriding postmodern methodological shifts in sociology has been the rejection of empirical research in favour of a deconstructive approach to texts whereby one's findings can only ever be described as one interpretation amongst many possible others.

One particularly influential theorist on the tenacious status of power and knowledge is Michel Foucault. Better described as a post-structuralist than a postmodernist, Foucault rejects the idea that an underlying order to history can be identified and recorded, and

instead focuses his attention on the discursive formations which constitute our social worlds. He particularly objects to the way in which historians have attempted to categorise and synthesise events into a chronological series:

it is...supposed that one and the same form of historicity operates upon economic structures, social institutions and customs, the inertia of mental attitudes, technological practices, political behaviour and subjects them all to the same type of transformation. (Foucault 2002:11)

Foucault opposes structuralism's use of 'the categories of cultural totalities' to impose order on history and instead presents an alternative way of understanding the social which he describes as an 'archaeology of knowledge'. Within this framework, meaning is seen to not only emanate from discourse, but to actually be constitutive of it. The analysis of discourse in this context then asks, 'how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?' with the understanding of a text as a 'node within a network' containing a 'network of references' specific to its genre, aims and author. The aim of analysing discourse is, according to Foucault, not simply to understand the intention of the author, but rather 'to be able to grasp other forms of regularity and relations' such as relations between statements, relations between groups of statements and relations between statements and wider political and social events. The aim is also not to 'use' discourse to find out about something, but to study the discourse itself, and 'make it emerge in its own complexity'. In this sense, Foucault treats discourse as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak and which can be investigated by asking questions such as; Who is speaking? What are the institutional sites from which the discourse comes? and What subject positions are occupied in relation to the discourse?

Foucault also emphasises the importance of contextualising discourse in relation to other related discourses and of appreciating the complex nature of discourse which may be hidden beneath a 'smooth' exterior:

the rich uncertainty of disorder lays behind the visible façade of the system not 'life in an as yet uncaptured state' but an immense density of systematicities, a tight group of multiple relations. (Foucault 2002:84)

Although, traditionally, analysis of discourse has attempted to show how texts refer to one another, converge with institutions and practices and carry historically specific meanings, Foucault rejects this homogenous approach and instead wishes ‘to determine the principle according to which only the ‘signifying’ groups that were enunciated could appear...to establish a law of rarity.’ (ibid:134). Based on the assumption that everything is never said Foucault’s approach aims to weigh the value of statements, ‘a value that is not defined by their truth...but which characterises their place, their capacity for circulation and exchange, their possibility of transformation’ (ibid:136). Foucault conceptualises statements and utterances as determined by exteriority and his analysis of statements operates without reference to ‘a cogito’. Foucault is therefore opposed to structuralist theories which search for totalities and secrets of origin and describes himself as a positivist who is interested only in what can be described:

Archaeology tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules. (Foucault 2002:155)

The importance of recognising the complexity of discursive formations and not simply attempting to identify a unifying principle of cohesion is paramount to Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge:

A discursive formation is not...an ideal, continuous smooth text that runs beneath the multiplicity of contradictions, and resolves them in the calm unity of coherent thought...It is rather a space of multiple dissensions; a set of different oppositions whose levels and roles must be described. (ibid: 173)

Although Foucault’s argument for the precedence of discourse as an object of study in itself forms the theoretical basis for this section of the study, it is necessary to refer elsewhere for a more practical explanation of the analytic techniques involved in such a methodological approach. For this reason, the following sub-section focuses on the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987, 1992) who are particularly eloquent in their explanations of the slippery business of actually doing discourse analysis. The following section describes their

approach and explains how discourse analysis will be applied to the analysis of the data on child stars in the present study.

4.3.2 Doing Discourse Analysis

The art of discourse analysis has been described by Wetherell and Potter as:

Charting themes and ideologies, exploring the heterogeneous and layered texture of practices, arguments and representations which make up the taken for granted in a particular society. (1992:1)

Wetherell and Potter make clear that although there is no definable method to discourse analysis in the traditional, experimental sense of the word, it provides a broad theoretical framework for understanding and interpreting the role of discourse in social life and is flexible enough to examine a subject from a number of angles. Furthermore, as emphasised by Foucault, discourse analysis is not seeking to uncover an underlying, external reality or truth, but treats discourse as a reality in itself which is constructed and reconstructed through social acts and language every day:

Participants' discourse or social texts are approached in **their own right** and not as a secondary route to things 'beyond' the text...Discourse is treated as a potent, action-orientated medium, not a transparent information channel. (Potter and Wetherell 1987:160)

In their study of the legitimation of exploitation in the language of racism, Potter and Wetherell (1992) identified three main aims of the discourse analysis employed:

- to perform historical analysis and thus locate contemporary discourse within some changing, social, economic and political context
- to examine the power of ideology as rationalisation and justification
- to examine how ideologies actively construct and create new types of identity and subject positions.

In relation to the aims of this study then, discourse analysis provides a way of exploring how the labels 'child star' and 'former child star' have been formed and applied, the origin of the negative connotations of both terms and the 'common-sense' principles on which they are based, and the creation and internalisation of subject positions for those individuals who fall into either category. As Potter and Wetherell explain, discourse analysis is particularly useful in understanding both the social and cultural mechanisms and processes at work in the construction of subjects and the complicit nature of the subjects themselves in internalising and reinforcing shared social norms.

Potter and Wetherell argue that the power of ideology is forceful, effective, has visible results and is embodied in ideological state apparatuses such as schools, churches and the mass media; 'all places where people are subjected and trained to recognise themselves in particular ways.' (1992:29). From this perspective the category 'child star' can be seen as related to wider belief systems and discourses on children and childhood which define and control what childhood means. Such shared ideologies are then justified, rationalised and naturalised through, among other channels, the mass media. Therefore, analysing media stories about child stars is one way in which to ascertain how dominant, collective ideals relating to children in general and child stars in particular become part of the fabric of social life and cease to be questioned or challenged.

As Miles (1982) observes in his analysis of racism, certain explanations, although purely anecdotal and having no scientific basis have enough 'practical adequacy' to be accepted as common sense, thus taking on a power of their own which is unrelated to the reality of a situation. Similarly, the way in which certain accepted truisms about child stars and their parents have this kind of currency will be addressed in the analysis.

According to Hamilton and Troler (1986) our inherent and inevitable need to impose categories on the world in order to simplify and control our environment (and indeed our minds) underlies the creation and reinforcement of stereotypes in society:

social categories quickly become a focus for an associated baggage of beliefs, thoughts and value judgements about the people within the category. (Hamilton and Trolie quoted in Potter and Wetherell 1992:38)

By looking at child stars and former child stars as social categories it is clear that certain traits and types of behaviour are both attributed to and expected of the members of these groups. Discourse analysis allows the identification of the constructed nature of these assumptions and can illuminate how such shared beliefs serve to position and define the subject. The question of why child stars are presented in certain ways and not others will be addressed in the analysis, along with the psychological impact of such presentations on the individuals concerned. As Potter and Wetherell assert, discourse is 'actively constitutive of both social and psychological processes' (1992:59) and it is this connection between dominant collective beliefs and the individual's construction of identity which renders analysis of discourse so appropriate for researching the phenomenon of child stars.

The crucial aspect...is whose story will be accepted and become part of the general currency of explanation, whose version of events, whose account of the way things are? (Potter and Wetherell 1992:62)

As Foucault argues in his genealogical approach to social history as described above, the power of discourse develops through 'normalization', through defining what is usual and habitual and to be expected as opposed to the deviant and exceptional, and people become subjected and regulated through the kinds of identities assumed in discourse.

Attempting to ascertain how one version of the 'truth' becomes established and alternatives undermined over time is only possible by analysing historical data relating to the same subject. As such, this study includes articles on and reviews of child stars from the Victorian era to the present day. It is hoped that this historical perspective will allow some of the themes and ideas which inform current stories about child stars to be traced back to their origins and for others to stand out as indisputably contemporary. With this distinction it should be possible to identify the way in which discursive categories become constructed in different social contexts and how some versions of 'reality' become established and accepted as 'truth' over time whilst others fall by the wayside.

4.3.3 Stages of Data Analysis

Much of the work of discourse analysis is a craft skill, something like bicycle riding or chicken sexing that is not easy to render or describe in an explicit or codified manner. (Potter and Wetherell 1992:101)

As implied in the above quote, the analysis of discourse doesn't involve a 'cookbook' style methodology and has been described as being more of an art than a science. However, Potter and Wetherell (1987) have identified the main stages in the analysis of discourse which, although more interchangeable phases than clear sequential steps, provided a useful guide for the analysis of data for this study. The relevant stages for this analysis were: research question, sample selection, collection of records and documents, coding and analysis and each stage will be discussed below.

The research question

The broad question asked in all discourse analysis is 'how is discourse put together and what is gained by this construction?' For the purposes of this study the central question to be addressed was how and why certain stereotypes of the categories 'child star' and 'former child star' came to be naturalised over time and how such subject positions become part of an individual's constructed identity.

Sample selection and collection of documents

The data for this study is textual and from secondary sources and represents a wide range of writing and pictures from a variety of diverse sources such as tabloid and broadsheet press, magazines, books and internet news and gossip sites.

The selection of material for the study was as inclusive as possible and all articles or interviews about or relating to child stars which were collected were incorporated in the preliminary stages of coding. Following the suggestions made by Glaser and Strauss (1968) in their description of 'Grounded Theory' data only stopped being collected when it was felt that 'theoretical saturation' had occurred. That is to say when no new coding

categories occurred, no new properties could be added to the existing coding categories and when there also seemed to be enough instances to constitute a pattern.

Although emanating from a huge variety of diverse publications the data comprises two main sets. The first is made up of newspaper stories *about* child stars and former child stars and the second is made up of newspaper and magazine interviews *with* child stars and former child stars (although there is an overlap with some of the pieces falling into both categories). Much of the data is contemporary and was collected over the period September 2002 to September 2003, although using internet searches it was also possible to collect newspaper articles from archives of British national papers from the last 5 years, as well as from American and Australian publications. However, even after the main phase of data collection had been completed I found it impossible to ignore relevant articles I saw in daily papers and magazines and frequently added new items to the dataset which generally complemented the data already collected, but sometimes involved revisions to the coding or new themes being included in the analysis. Therefore there is also some data from 2004 and 2005. There is also a substantial amount of data from newspapers and magazines from the 1880s to the 1950s which mainly takes the form of interviews with child stars or former child stars but which also includes some editorial material. The inclusion of the historical data is intended to allow a separation of themes which can be classed as consistent in the framing and presentation of child stars by the media and those which seem to be specific to our culture at this time. The historical articles on child stars from Victorian publications such as *Interlude* and later from issues of magazines such as *Photoplay* from the 1940s and 1950s were found at Colindale Newspaper Library in North London which holds archives of such publications on microfilm.¹

As well as the data from newspapers and magazines I also used autobiographies and biographies of child stars which were useful on two counts. Firstly, they often contained quotes from newspaper articles and reviews relating to the star in question which could then be used as part of the analysis of how the child star is constructed by the media. Secondly,

¹ References made to child actors before that time, such as the Elizabethan boy actors described in the Social History chapter, are from historical studies which have already been carried out and do not constitute part of the data set used for the analysis. Unfortunately, it was not possible to find original data referring to child performers before the Victorian era.

they also allowed analysis both of the narrative conventions at play in stories about child stars and the pattern of techniques used by former child stars to justify and explain their experiences. In this sense the autobiographical and biographical data served to complement the newspaper and magazine articles and also allowed the exploration of a more sustained version of story telling by the child stars themselves.

Before analysing the stories which were published in the print media it was important to recognise that, of course, as in all areas of media publication a careful editorial selection process takes place as to what is and is not 'news' and so the stories about child stars in the public realm are automatically those which are the most sensationalist, shocking or bizarre. There are plenty of child stars who have gone on to have either a successful acting career or a 'normal' life and who never became an addict, a criminal or a serial 'wedder', and are no more news worthy than anyone else. However, what was interesting for the purposes of this analysis was why the exploits of child stars are framed and structured in the way they are and how these stories reinforce conventional normative standards of behaviour for children, and parents, with no reference to the wider responsibility of the society which has created the need for such children in the first place.

Indeed, what is chosen as news and how it is reported has a significant impact on the news itself, and how it is read and this in itself can be seen as contributing to a new version of 'reality', as so deftly described below:

Journalism not only reports on the operation of appearances, and on realities underlying appearances, but also creates appearances or the appearance of realities. (Bensman and Lilienfield 1973 quoted in Chaney 1979:33)

That the media creates an 'appearance of reality' is indisputable, but understanding why certain 'realities' are created and not others is the key to identifying the dominant discourses which inform cultural exchanges of a society at any given point in time. It is for this reason that documentary data is so valuable as it is the tangible manifestation of the shifting discursive formations through which meaning is constructed and shared with the wider society.

The use of documentary data for the analysis was therefore felt to be appropriate because of the way that such secondary resources allow the researcher to stand outside the data and develop theories about the social world without being directly involved with the subjects of the research and without creating an artificial situation from which the data emanates.

As Potter and Wetherell observe; ‘one of the most important advantages of collecting naturalistic records and documents is the almost complete absence of researcher influence on the data’ (1987:162).

Although of course describing newspaper texts as ‘naturalistic’ is a rather misleading nomenclature - as Chaney (1979) wisely observes, ‘in all media there are no accidental features’.

Another possible data collection technique for this study would have been to interview child stars and /or former child stars directly and then code and analyse the transcripts according to the themes of the research. However, for the reasons given above, plus the practical difficulties of accessing the relevant subjects, this method was rejected. Furthermore, having read many interviews with child stars and former child stars it was felt that certain stock responses and modes of justification and explanation were so common as to be predictable, suggesting that little could have been added to the findings from interviews directly collected by the researcher. In essence, unless the subject was a personal friend, it was unlikely that an interview with a social researcher would have elicited anything other than the standard range of replies to questions and that the ‘public face’ of the individual would have remained in place. In any case, what was being investigated was the way in which the discourse itself works to create subjects and meaning, not a psychological study on the child stars themselves.

Coding

Codes were identified by searching through the material for recurring themes. Although the coding was distinct from the analysis itself, it provided a framework of issues which

were later focussed on in detail. The main themes which presented themselves at this stage included; reasons for becoming a child performer, how the career started, parental attitudes, the importance of being a natural performer, the stigma of being a child star and the experience of growing up as a former child star. The coding process was cyclical, and as the understanding of a particular theme developed it was frequently necessary to go back through the documents and refine the categories or include instances that had before seemed irrelevant. The process was also flexible as themes would sometimes merge together, disappear or split into distinct categories and new themes would also often become apparent with re-readings of the material or with the addition of new material.

The subjective nature of coding and of making decisions as to what is and is not important or relevant to a particular study is perhaps an indefensible weakness of this approach to data analysis and yet it seems an unavoidable problem. Although it renders verification of results by repetition of the study an extremely tenuous method of validation, it is hoped that the inclusion of a multitude of representative examples in the analysis chapters themselves will serve to corroborate the interpretations made.

Analysis

As noted previously, the analysis of data for this study is two-fold, with the first data analysis chapter approaching the texts using discourse analysis and the second analysing the data from a structuralist perspective. Although the data collection and coding stages of the research were common to both approaches, there was obviously divergence in the actual analysis of the texts due to the different theoretical aims of each technique. Therefore, this section refers only to the discourse analysis employed in the first data analysis chapter. An explication of the techniques used in the structuralist analysis will be included in the next section along with a consideration of some of the underlying theories of structuralism.

The analysis of the coded material was based on the search for patterns in the data – either in terms of shared features or differences in the stories and interviews. The overall goal was to deconstruct the ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of the dominant reading of the child star in our culture. This was achieved by identifying frequently used words, phrases and themes in

the stories about child stars in the press which constituted them as a subject in a particular way, and then to contextualise the stories in relation to wider themes and discourses concerning childhood, celebrity, success, transgression and stigma.

Having described the social construction of the child star as transgressive and deviant, the aim then was to identify common methods of justification, rationalisation or interpretation of experience by the child stars themselves as evident in the interviews and autobiographies that formed part of the data set.

In order to develop hypotheses about the function and consequence of the patterns of language evident in the material it was useful to draw on theorists as diverse as Mary Douglas (1966) and Erving Goffman (1963) on the themes of transgression and stigma.

Goffman's analysis of the social taboo of stigma provided a particularly helpful theoretical scaffold for the interpretation of the interview and autobiographical data. By conceptualising child stardom as a stigma it was possible to read the interview responses and narratives of former child stars as attempts to display 'authenticity' and to realign themselves with the social norms which had been transgressed - a pattern of justification that could be read as a direct response to the negative way in which they are constructed by the mass media. It was this reading of the data as indicative of the child star as helplessly constructed and constrained by cultural and social definitions that led to the decision to focus this section of the analysis on the powerlessness of the child star, and by default, on the powerlessness of children in our society more generally to escape the expectations and subjectification imposed upon them by society at large.

Another useful methodological technique for making sense of the secondary interview data was that of narrative analysis. This approach is most often used to analyse personal narratives collected via lengthy semi-structured interviews in order to understand how individuals construct past events and actions to claim identities and construct lives. Although the data for the present study does not consist of such 'pure' extensive narratives collected by the researcher herself, the published interviews and autobiographical texts do represent a substantial amount of self told narratives, which although heavily edited and in

the case of newspaper interviews, very possibly fragmented and reordered, do lend themselves to being analysed in a similar way. For example, narrative analysis gives precedence to the way in which language is constitutive of reality and not simply a technical device for establishing meaning, and focuses on how culture 'speaks itself' through an individual's story;

Narrators speak in terms that seem natural, but we can analyse how culturally and historically contingent these terms are. (Riessman 1993:5)

Narrative analysis also seeks to recognise conventional elements of different narrative genres which engage the listener in different ways. For example, with the stories about child stars it was possible to identify certain elements of justification and rationalisation which recurred in many of the texts which led to consideration of the fundamental question of 'Why is this story being told this way and not another?'

Narrative analysis also highlights the importance of agency in the re-telling of personal stories. Does the subject describe events using an active or a passive verb – did they 'do' something or did something 'happen' to them? The distancing of the passive construction often indicates discomfort with the outcome of events which can be informative as to the extent to which an experience deviates from perceived social convention. For example, 'I was given my first speaking part at the age of seven', clearly has a very different connotation from, 'I got my first speaking part at the age of seven' although one statement is not more or less 'true' than the other and may refer to exactly the same event. Indeed, the way a story is told is often more important than the verity of the primary experience being recounted and as such uncovering or finding the 'truth' about an individual's life is not the overriding goal of narrative analysis. As Riessman explains an individual under scrutiny is always aware of the image of themselves that they are projecting and of the overall message about themselves that they wish to convey:

It is always possible to narrate the same event in radically different ways, depending on the values and interests of the narrator...Individuals exclude experiences that undermine the current identities they wish to claim. (Riessman 1993:64)

The recognition that an individual's account is always and only one interpretation of events, one selective version among many, is one of the key characteristics of discourse analysis and is highly relevant to the analysis of interviews with former child stars which is contained in the proceeding chapter and to the analysis of how stereotypical images of child stars more generally are constructed by the media. The way in which narrative analysts focus on which cultural and linguistic resources informants draw on in telling their story and, crucially, how they persuade a listener of the authenticity of their account are also useful tools for the discursive analysis of texts containing less 'natural narratives', which nonetheless operate on a similar basis.

This section has described the approach to data analysis which will be utilised in the first data analysis chapter. Using the general tenets of discourse analysis which conceptualises meaning as being socially specific, non-constant and constituted through text, the ways in which a certain version of child stardom has arisen will be outlined and challenged as reductionist and stereotypical. The techniques by which child stars themselves, having been formed as subjects by the discourse surrounding them, explain and justify their experiences will then be explored with an overriding focus on how such individuals are rendered powerless to be accepted beyond the boundaries of their socially constructed label of 'child star' or worse still, 'former child star'.

Having established the culturally specific, negative version of child stardom which informs both our current understanding of the child star and the experience of being or having been a child star, the second data analysis chapter sets out to achieve a different objective. Taking as a starting point the universal power of child stars to generate emotion, entertain and inspire, rather than on their socially constructed powerlessness the following section explains how and why it was felt necessary to also analyse the data set using a structuralist perspective in order to understand not just how child stars are constructed in our culture, but why they are actually there in the first place.

4.4 Structural Analysis

4.4.1 A Theoretical Background

Structuralism can be broadly described as any doctrine stating that social analysis should be involved with exploring beneath ‘surface appearances’ in order to access the deeper, ultimately more ‘real’ structures seen as determining social relations. Within structuralist methodologies, ‘structures’ take priority over human actors and the aim of research is to uncover or identify the underlying forms which determine behaviour and practices.

As an approach to social or cultural analysis structuralism is evidently diametrically opposed to the methodology of discourse analysis which emanates from Foucault’s theory of discursive formations as described in the previous section. Whereas discourse analysis takes as its premise that meaning is actively created through discourse and the relations between discourses, and that discourse is both subject to change and open to challenge, structuralism is more concerned with the permanent structures which represent the constant elements of human experience and communication. Foucault makes clear the fact that examining discourse is not a search for what things ‘really mean’, but is rather a questioning of how discourse rather arbitrarily forms objects and subjective positions in both private and public life. However, he also accepts that structuralism can be a useful tool in investigating certain aspects of culture:

I recognise the value of its insights...when it is a question of analysing a language, mythologies, folk-tales, poems, dreams, works of literature, even films perhaps, structural description reveals relations that could not otherwise be isolated...I now have no difficulty in accepting that man’s language, his unconscious, and his imagination are governed by laws of structure. (Foucault 2002:221)

The ‘laws of structure’ which underpin the meaning of such cultural products are generally understood to emanate from the linguistic rules and patterns which have been identified through semiology, which studies the system of signs. Semiology evolved from the linguistic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) who demonstrated how:

Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others.
(Saussure 1974:114)

Saussure's theoretical distinction between *langue* and *parole*, that is between the rules of language and actual instances of produced speech, and his demonstration of the arbitrary relationship between the signifier (the sign itself) and the signified (the meaning that is attached to the sign) opened up the possibility of identifying the underlying structures on which all language is based and how it works to carry and share meaning.

Structuralism as an approach to social analysis has developed from the application of linguistic theory and method to all aspects of culture. As noted above, the central idea is that there is a universal substructure to every language system, although each is unique, and that each component of meaning only makes sense in terms of its interrelations with other components. In terms of social and cultural research the potential of a structuralist approach in understanding how meaning is created and shared is clear as it is based on the search for the dominant codes or myths or reference systems that underlie the surface appearance of signs. Indeed, as Robey explains, it is arguable that social actions can only be understood by examining the set of underlying relations through which things can function as signs:

Actions are meaningful only with respect to a set of institutional conventions...various social rules make it possible to marry, to score a goal, to write a poem, to be impolite. It is in this sense that a culture is composed of a set of symbolic systems. (Robey 1973:22)

The wider systems of meanings which inform culture have been investigated in a variety of ways by structuralist theorists. Judith Williamson's seminal study *Decoding Advertisements* (1978) demonstrated the way that advertising is one of the most influential ideological forms in contemporary capitalist society due to the way it works to transfer shared meanings associated with certain signs onto products. For example, in an advert for a Building society which includes a man's hand putting a ring onto a woman's finger and the words 'Promise, Confidence and Security' the meaning of marriage as security is transferred to the security offered by the building society:

In other words, Security, signified by the hand, becomes a signifier, in its possible absence, of the need for Halifax; it is then returned to its original status of signified through the conduit of the product. (Williamson 1978:34)

Williamson calls these knowledges which structure advertising and many other social and cultural forms 'referent systems'. Stuart Hall (1980) uses the term 'codes' to describe the same concept and explains how a code is a set of conventionalised ways of making meaning that are specific to particular groups of people. Hall claims that it is through codes that the semiologist gains access to the wider ideologies at work in a society.

Other structuralist theorists have conceptualised meaning as emanating from a less tangible system of knowledge that includes reference not only to content but also to form. For example, Roland Barthes famously applied the methods of linguistics to what he termed 'cultural artefacts' in *Mythologies*, a collection of essays which explored how deep levels of meaning can be read into the most everyday images and objects only because of peoples' shared 'unconscious' knowledge of how signs, words and symbols work together as a system to engender dominant readings. In this study he discriminates between first and second order semiological systems and claims that myth is a second order system which is built on denotive signs. This difference is explained by Rose:

Denotive signs consist of a signifier and a signified but they are fairly easy to understand, and Barthes suggests this is the first-order semiological system. The denotive sign, however, becomes a signifier at the second, or mythological, level of meaning. At this second level of meaning, this signifier is then accompanied by its own signified. (Rose 2001:90)

For example, Barthes describes the dual levels of meaning of a photograph of a young black man in French uniform saluting the French flag on the cover of a copy of *Paris Match* magazine. At a denotive level, he explains, the soldier 'appears as a rich, fully experienced, spontaneous, indisputable image'. However, the signification of the image replaces the immediacy of its surface meaning and the second level connotation of the photo is described by Barthes thus:

France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this man in serving his so-called oppressors. (Barthés 1972:125)

The myth as ‘non-historical truth’ is then part of the meaning of this picture and serves to reinforce the dominant ideology of French imperialism which drives the broader culture.

Structural analysis then serves to illuminate the way in which;

meanings we take as natural are the historical products of a cultural system...(and that) conventional meanings are made to seem natural and inevitable by semiological procedures. (Robey 1973:29)

Structuralism has been applied to many different cultural and social contexts in order to explore how meaning depends on how constituent elements of a whole are articulated.

For example the anthropologist Levi-Strauss undertook a quest for the invariant elements among the superficial differences of world myths, and found that human referent systems are always organised in binary terms with elements either being ‘raw’ (in their natural form) or ‘cooked’ (transformed by culture). This idea that binary classification systems mirror the cognitive structure of the human mind was further investigated by Edmund Leach (1963) in his research into the universality of the ‘taboo’ and by Vladimir Propp’s (1969) study of the consistent structure of transformations in fairy tales.

Psychoanalytic theory as developed by Freud at the end of the nineteenth century can also be described as adopting a structuralist approach to understanding the relationship between the individual and society. This is due to the way in which it:

offers a way of interpreting the signs of an image in relation, not to particular referent systems, dominant codes or mythologies, but rather in relation to the unconscious and its dynamics. (Rose 2001:105)

Psychoanalysis often focuses on understanding emotional reactions to events, images and texts with the recognition that some reactions emanate from the unconscious rather than conscious level of our mind. Psychoanalytic theorists have also applied the tenets of this approach to the analysis of cultural products such as film in order to demonstrate how certain ways of seeing are naturalised and reinforced through the conventional practices of genre. For example, Mulvey's (1989) 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' uses Lacan's theory of the 'mirror stage' to explore the representation of male figures in narrative cinema and the ways in which the audience is positioned by that representation.

Other aspects of psychoanalytic theory are particularly useful in understanding the possible meanings of certain images and symbols which recur in the stories, pictures and dreams of all people and which can be seen as evidence of a shared system of meaning which is inherent in our cognitive structure. In particular the work of Carl Jung on archetypes and the collective unconscious offers a way of reading the manifestation of images in human culture that goes beyond socially constructed norms and which potentially connects such representations to universal psychic structures.

It is clear then that structuralism refers to a multitude of theoretical and analytic techniques which all share the aim of understanding social relations in terms of the structures which give the elements in any given situation their meaning. Structuralism as a theoretical approach to social analysis has fallen out of favour in recent years due largely to its reluctance to accept the role of human agency in the construction and reconstruction of meaning in society. However, there can be no doubt as to the importance of structuralism in offering techniques and ways of thinking with which it is possible to explore the potentially universal elements of human experience.

Given the universal existence of children throughout history both physically and symbolically in myths and stories, it seems clear that a structuralist approach to exploring the significance of a particular group of children who are set apart as special and different to others (i.e. child stars) could be an important and useful way of understanding their role in society.

4.4.2 A Structuralist Methodology

With such a wide variety of approaches informing structuralist theory, undertaking a structuralist methodology for the current research project was not a straightforward proposition. In the end, it was decided that rather than one thematic approach to the data, it would be more productive to employ a range of ideas and methods of analysis all of which fall under the umbrella of structuralism and which seemed to be the most fruitful avenues of enquiry given the nature of the data available.

For this reason, this chapter of the analysis was split into three sections, each encompassing an element of structuralist theory which was felt to be relevant to the understanding of the cultural significance of the child star. The overriding theme of each section is to demonstrate the power that is inherent in the concept of the child star due to its connection to a referent system of mythology and meaning which reaches beyond the confines of the text itself.

The structural analysis was undertaken on the same data set which was used for the discourse analysis, although extra stories about Charlotte Church and some images of child stars were specifically collected for the purposes of this analysis chapter only. There was of course a selective procedure in deciding which texts and images were relevant to the aims of this chapter and this process was entirely subjective and intuitive, although care was taken to include as wide a range of relevant examples as possible in order to demonstrate the recurrent patterns in certain ways of representing child stars which seem to suggest a structural basis to their shared meaning. The emphasis on the power of the child star throughout the analysis is a deliberate attempt to both challenge the dominant idea that the child star is an object of pity and also to demonstrate the limitations of understanding any aspect of childhood purely as a discursive formation.

In the first section images and descriptions of child stars are compared to Jung's archetype of the 'wonder-child' in an attempt to explore the universal features of this recurrent symbol of regeneration and fulfilment. Examples of manifestations of this archetype throughout history and across cultures are also included in the analysis in order to try to

connect our representations of the child to references beyond our current social constructions of childhood. The idea that the power of the child star resides in its being both 'bigger than big and smaller than small' is examined in relation to the iconic image of the Christ child; and the cult of naturalness, which seems to characterise our preferred representation of the child star, is explored as emanating from mythical stories about the pre-cultural child.

The second section uses the theories of Leach on cognitive categorisation to explore the underlying linguistic patterns in the media stories which give meaning to the term 'child star'. Taking as its starting point Leach's premise that those beings who transgress 'normality' are powerful, the child star is explored as both an accursed and a sacred being who is set apart from society by universal narrative techniques which seek to reaffirm the social order. The way in which universal themes of taboo and transgression are articulated in relation to child stars through their representations in the media is seen as part of a wider system of meaning which is created through binary opposites and which is part of the anthropological tradition of structuralism.

The final section considers the narrative structure of stories about child stars as a whole and relates their function and form to the structures of classic myths and fairytales. Indeed, as Chaney comments;

an important dimension of a story's significance derives from the way a story has been put together. More specifically, the story's presuppositions about the relationships between author, audience and community constitute a 'vision' or 'perspective', a way of structuring the story, which relates to institutionalised relationships in the social context. (Chaney 1979:128)

Using stories about Charlotte Church over a period of several years as she grew from child soprano to brash teenager, the timeless value of the child star as symbolic of hope and purity in a cruel world is explored and the rhetorical code which the stories employ is analysed. The way that meaning is imbued in Church's on-going story by the press is related to Joseph Campbell's (1993) description of the ubiquitous narrative path of the hero

in mythical and folk stories and the use of the child star as a vehicle for embodying universal themes of good and evil is explored.

This attempt at a structuralist analysis of the data about child stars will be evaluated in the conclusion and its usefulness as an approach to understanding elements of childhood will be discussed.

By applying a broadly structuralist methodology to the analysis of media stories about child stars it is hoped that another dimension to our understanding of this phenomenon will be revealed - one which illuminates the power of the child star as a transcendent symbol of hope and light, rather than simply as a powerless pawn in the entertainment industry's fickle game. However, the aim of the research is not to discredit or champion one reading of the child star over another, but more to demonstrate the complexity surrounding this extraordinary group of children who can be understood as both powerless or powerful depending on which elements of their representations one chooses to focus on. Furthermore, it is hoped that the structuralist analysis will demonstrate the usefulness of this approach in understanding the complex status of children and childhood more generally in our society and show that certain gaps are left by theories of social construction which can only be understood with reference to a wider system of meaning and structure.

One way of including a structuralist approach to understanding childhood in recent studies has been to identify and describe children's roles in the cultural reproduction of their societies (e.g. Corsaro 1997, Qvortrup 1990) whereby;

the notion of childhood as a period in an individual's life course is now complemented with a second notion of childhood as a permanent 'structural' category in society. (Alanen 2000:496)

This shift from conceptualising childhood as simply a particular time in an individual's life to seeing it as part of the overall structure of society though is still somewhat limited. Perhaps a move towards an understanding of childhood in terms of cognitive structures too would enable other questions about why children are represented the way they are in our culture and why certain roles are required of them to be addressed. It is hoped that this

analysis will demonstrate that childhood is also a permanent structural category of the mind as well as of society.

The next section will discuss issues of reflexivity and validity in relation to the present study and will highlight some of the theoretical difficulties of designing a methodology which encompasses two very different approaches to social analysis.

4.5 Reflexivity and Validity

As with all qualitative approaches to social analysis, issues of validation in relation to the current study are about establishing the credibility of a researcher's interpretation of the data, rather than about the 'truth' of the findings. Clearly, my reading of the data is itself located in discourse – the current language and methods of sociology most evidently - but my reading is also influenced by my status as, among other things, a woman, a teacher and a consumer of popular culture. The kinds of knowledge and versions of what is 'normal' that are associated with these social categories are part and parcel of the way that I interpret the world, however much I make an effort to 'stand outside' of myself and analyse data objectively.

In effect, a judgement free analysis of qualitative data is no more than an impossible ideal, and one that, on closer inspection may be meaningless in a practical sense. We live in a world where meaning is shared and constructed by people, so to try to understand such a world by distancing ourselves from our own place in it leaves us, hypothetically, as having no position from which to speak or be heard.

Nonetheless, if we are to hope that our necessarily subjective readings of social data are to have shared value then we must accept the need to align our findings with established ways of demonstrating the validity of our work.

To this end, there are several techniques which can be used to validate the findings of this kind of research and the ones which are relevant to the present study are outlined below:

1. Coherence

Analysis should give coherence to a body of discourse and should show how different elements fit together and produce effects and functions. Potter and Wetherell emphasise the importance of ensuring 'loose ends' are included in the analysis as:

If the explanation covers both the broad pattern, and accounts for many of the micro-sequences, then we will take it more seriously. (1987:170)

This need for coherence was addressed in the current study by including items from both national and local newspapers which presented child stars in very different ways, and by including unexpected quotes and statements which went against the main thrust of the argument and trying to explain them in terms of the central analytic themes. Indeed, as Potter and Wetherell explain, it is the exceptions to the standard example which often confirm the explanatory scope of our scheme and:

If there are no special features which plausibly explain difference, the exclusive nature of our scheme must be questioned. (1987:170)

Agar and Hobbs (1982) emphasise the importance of being open to continuously modifying the initial hypotheses of research in light of the structure of particular texts and the recurrent themes that unify them. In this study the data, rather than a pre-set hypothesis, certainly led the research and the desire for a coherent explanatory system was central to the aims of the study and led to many re-readings of the data set and modifications to the coding and analysis.

2. Persuasiveness

The criterion of persuasiveness asks the question: 'Is the interpretation reasonable and convincing?' Persuasiveness is strongest when theoretical statements are supported with empirical evidence and also when alternative interpretations of the data are considered. For this reason, throughout this study, great care has been taken to ensure that theoretical claims are always demonstrated by several examples from the texts under analysis. The

way in which the entire data analysis is divided into two alternate readings also serves to show how different interpretations of the data are possible. Ultimately, I do not aim to convince the reader of the inherent plausibility of one reading over the other, but on the contrary, to demonstrate the complexity of the 'child star' as a cultural category.

Even so, it has been commented that the persuasiveness of a piece of qualitative research often resides more in the rhetorical style of the author, than in the veracity of the analysis and as Riessman notes:

Persuasiveness ultimately rests in the rhetoric of writing – on literary practices – and reader responses. What may be the most persuasive interpretation of a text at one historical moment may not be later. Our texts have unstable meanings. (Riessman 1993:66)

3. Correspondence

The main objective of achieving correspondence is that an investigator can take results back to the original or similar data and come up with the same conclusions. Having already outlined the subjective nature of the type of research undertaken for this study and the way in which texts are open to a number of different interpretations, including correspondence as a criterion of validity seems to be somewhat ambitious.

However, the inclusion of extensive quotations and extracts of texts from the data analysed to illustrate the interpretative remarks made are intended as corresponding evidence as to the validity of the theoretical claims made in the present study. The way in which data collected after the first main phases of collection, coding and analysis was taken into account in the construction of themes and explanatory schemes for the research has also hopefully rendered the final work a thorough and replicable exercise in examining certain aspects of what it means to be a child star.

4. Fruitfulness

Potter and Wetherell (1987) identify fruitfulness as the most powerful criterion of validity on which to judge a piece of research and describe it thus:

the scope of an analytic scheme to make sense of new kinds of discourse and to generate novel explanations. (1987:171)

It is hoped that the current research will be fruitful in three main ways. Firstly, by offering a way of understanding an aspect of childhood in terms of both its socially constructed specificity and its connection to universal themes and structures which may be also applied to understanding the complicated status of other groups of children who fall outside the 'normal' parameters of childhood. Secondly, by demonstrating the advantages of a mixed methodology in generating a range of ideas and theories about a research topic and thirdly, by presenting child stars as a unique and worthy subject of investigation in their own right due to their dual status both as embodiments of the ideal tenets of childhood and also as examples of failures of childhood.

The extent to which the present study achieves validity in reference to these four techniques of validation will be considered, albeit from a subjective perspective, in the conclusion.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the background to the current project and has explained the main aims and objectives of the research. The rationale behind designing a dual methodological approach to the data was described and the salience of the themes of power and powerlessness in relation to child stars was emphasised. The theoretical background to the discourse analysis section of the study was explored in relation to the work of Foucault and the analytic techniques of this process, as used in this study, were outlined in reference largely to the work of Potter and Wetherell. I then went on to discuss the limitations of a purely constructionist approach to understanding child stars and suggested the potential usefulness of including theories of structuralism in achieving a fuller understanding of the

status of the child star in contemporary society. I outlined the major themes and areas of enquiry within the broad field of structuralist thinking with particular reference to linguistics and semiology. I then went on to describe the structuralist methodology I had designed for the current study which was three-fold involving the theoretical approaches of Carl Jung, Edmund Leach and Joseph Campbell. Finally, I discussed issues of validity and reflexivity in reference to qualitative research studies and offered four tenets of validation which the present study aims to fulfil.

The next two chapters consist of the analysis of the data collected for the study. The first uses discourse analysis to unpick the constructed powerlessness of child stars by the media and to examine the techniques employed by former child stars to re-establish their authenticity as adults.

The second analysis chapter adopts a structuralist approach to the data in order to examine the power of the child star as an eternal symbol of hope and unity and explores how the form their stories take in the press mirror certain mythological narrative conventions which seem to imbue the stories with meanings outside their immediate cultural context.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis I – The Powerlessness of Child Stars

Hollywood would save Bosnia before the life of a single child actor.¹

This chapter locates the discourse surrounding the child star in a social and psychological context by examining both the social construction of the category of the child star and the implications to the identity of individuals whose experiences render them members of such a category. The powerlessness of the individual to break free of the subject position created for him or herself by the media is a key theme of the work and is intended to highlight how control over discourse is a vital source of power and how certain discourses acquire authenticity and constitute the ‘truth of the matter’ at any given historical moment. The overriding aim of this chapter is to investigate the key question posed in the Introduction as to why it is that child stars are frequently denigrated and ridiculed in the media and to consider the repercussions of such a construction on the way self told narratives of former child stars are presented. The analysis is divided into two sections. The first is entitled ‘The Construction of the Child Star as Damaged and Transgressive’ and the second is called, ‘The Individual Response to Being Stigmatised as a Former Child Star’.

In the first section the language used in newspaper and magazine articles about child stars is examined using discourse analysis in order to ascertain the ways in which a certain version of the social reality of being a child star is established and normalised through the media. In *The Curse of the Child Star*, I will demonstrate how the idea of child stars being stigmatised or even cursed has become accepted in modern society through the way such individuals are written about and will identify the main linguistic and narrative techniques used to achieve this result. I will go on to argue that this discourse serves to reinforce wider social rules about the expected and preferred behaviour of children (and, to some extent, parents) and explore historical reasons for the current status of child stars, and particularly former child stars, as objects of ridicule and pity. In *Transgression and Punishment*, I go on to examine the ways in which child stars as a social group are rendered

¹ Former child star and advocate for the protection of child actors Paul Peterson quoted in Ryan 2000:187

powerless by their position in the categorisation framework which informs our shared system of meaning by drawing on Mary Douglas's (1966) work on pollution and taboo and other theories of transgression. I will demonstrate how child stars are conceptualised as anomalies in our culture and as such are subject to controlling techniques which serve to re-establish the social order, yet which do damage to the individual's sense of self and identity.

Having established the culturally constructed phenomenon of the stigmatised child star I will then consider in Section 5.2 the impact of such a negative shared social discourse on those individuals whose lives and identities have been directly affected and shaped by it. Through examining the narrative techniques evident in autobiographical accounts and interviews by and with former child stars I will demonstrate how recurrent patterns of explanation and justification are used in an attempt to regain authenticity and neutralise the effects of what Goffman (1963) termed as a 'spoiled identity'. Focussing on the self told stories of Macaulay Culkin, Drew Barrymore and other high profile performers, the standard narrative techniques used in accounts of child stardom and its subsequent long term effects are considered as protective strategies against the overwhelmingly destructive force of the dominant discourse on child stars prevalent in today's media culture.

5.1 The Construction of the Child Star as Damaged and Transgressive

5.1.1 *The Curse of the Child Star*

Decades after he counselled Mrs Worthington not to put her daughter on the stage, Noel Coward's advice still rings true. In Britain, the life of the pre-pubescent pop star is seldom happy. There's something of the Victorian chimney sweep about their brief careers: heartlessly overworked to capitalise on fleeting success, exposed to the harsh realities of life at a tender age, quickly discarded when the novelty wears off. At best, they can expect an irrevocable plunge into obscurity, unable to escape the burden of their early fame. At worse they suffer a grisly, untimely fate, succumbing to drugs or eating disorders.
(The Guardian 10.08.01)

The idea that there is a curse on child stars which inevitably leads them into disaster in adult life as so explicitly described above is a pervasive one in our media culture and is consistently reinforced through sensationalist newspaper headlines such as:

FORMER CHILD ACTOR FACES MURDER CHARGE
(re. Skylar Deleon 17.08.05 www.CNN.com)

CHILD STAR'S SHAME: STONED ALONE, CULKIN ARRESTED
AFTER DRUGS FIND (Glasgow Sunday Mail 19.09.04)

CHILD STARS REVEAL HOW THEIR DREAMS OF FAME
TURNED INTO A NIGHTMARE (The Sun 09.07.05)

or the ultimate:

CHILD TV STAR FOUND DEAD
(re. Anissa Jones New York Daily Times 30.08.76)

Indeed, so unquestioned is it now that child stardom has dangerous and terrible consequences that any other outcome is either ignored, downplayed or treated with shocked surprise. For example in an interview with the actor Todd Carty who has had a very successful career both as a child and an adult, the journalist seems baffled that:

There is no evidence that Todd Carty has ever obeyed the customary child star trajectory and gone off the rails. Or have I missed something?
(Observer 08.09.02)

Similarly, an article on the singer Aled Jones reports his apparent cheerfulness with surprise:

It is 16 years since the former child star's voice broke and his fame evaporated. By rights he should be crazy with bitterness, or mildly sour around the edges, but Jones looks pretty pleased with himself. (The Guardian 16.10.02)

Much more expected are stories which depict former child stars as forlorn, tragic figures whose lives have gone disastrously wrong, such as in this appraisal of Jamie Bell who was the lead actor in the hugely popular film *Billy Elliot* (1999) at the age of twelve:

Vodka binges, lost friends and a broken heart...lonely Billy Elliot star 5 years on. (The Sun 04.02.05)

The reality that most child actors actually go on to have happy and productive adult lives (especially if they create a career for themselves outside of show business) and that it is the unfortunate minority who take a more self-destructive path seems to have little bearing on the media construction of the child star and former child star as tormented and cursed individuals. What is particularly interesting is how this way of framing and presenting this specific social group has gained currency and become the current dominant discourse when child stars are discussed in the public realm.

The purpose of this section is to unpick this widely accepted truism by applying the principles of discourse analysis to articles and interviews on and about child stars in order to find out how such a discourse has gained currency and been naturalised in our society. As explained in the Methodology, discourse analysis is particularly useful for this type of research because as Wetherell and Potter explain, one of its key objectives is to explore; 'the arguments and representations which make up the taken for granted in a particular society.' (1992:1) and the supposed 'curse' of the child star certainly appears to be 'taken for granted' in the vast majority of articles analysed.

For example, comments and warnings about the perils of child stardom such as those quoted below are a stock beginning to reports about newly famous child actors and singers and work to naturalise the association of early fame with extreme danger:

Who wouldn't want to be plucked from obscurity, made into a star by one of the world's leading directors and given, apparently, the world at their feet? Anyone who's smart that's who. (The Guardian 23.05.00)

The horror stories of young actors whose childhoods end in parental estrangement, drug addiction or suicide are enough to terrify any sensible parent into giving stage and screen a wide berth. (The Guardian 22.11.00)

Child stars do not get a good press...stories of pushy parents, lost childhoods and damaged adults abound. It makes you grateful to have a thoroughly mediocre, bog-standard kid whose chief talent is an encyclopaedic knowledge of The Simpsons. (The Guardian 23.09.02)

Most child actors struggle to find meaningful lives as adults. (The Times T2 28.07.05)

The above rhetorical questions and assertions are clearly designed to appeal to traditional middle-class views concerning child-rearing. Within this set of values 'sensible parents' do not allow their children to become involved in the potential 'horror stories' of child stardom and there is an implicit agreement that having 'mediocre', normal kids is by far preferable to having a precociously famous and therefore automatically 'damaged' child. This default definition of child stars as being the product of working class, rather than middle-class, families who put the acquisition of fame and fortune before the welfare of their child is an important element of the overall construction of child stars as both deviant and powerless and therefore deserving any cursed bad luck which befalls them.

This message that the child star will be cursed in adult life is reinforced and naturalised in articles about child stars in a range of subtle and not so subtle ways. For instance, there is the ubiquitous and continual use of the term 'child star' (as in this piece also) for each and every child who has had any degree of success or exposure in the entertainment industry. Clearly, to be automatically elevated to the exalted position of a 'star' when still a child with all the expectation and baggage which that entails, almost guarantees failure as an adult. Simply to grow up with the inherent changes to voice and face that involves moves the individual further and further away from their childhood 'star' self – and there is, of course, an awfully long way to fall from being a 'star'. The following wistful comment is typical of the lament of the loss of the naive charm of child stars in articles which go on to relish the exploits of those who found fame at a young age:

If only Hollywood kids didn't have to grow up and could always just remain innocent stars. (The Guide p15 in The Guardian 30.07.05)

Another technique used to reinforce the concept of a curse is that of referencing the fanciful superstitious belief that good or lucky experiences have to be equalled out with bad or unlucky experiences. For example:

They wanted stardom, now they've got to pay for it – in karmic coin.
(The Guide in The Guardian 30.07.05)

Indeed, one of the strongest themes to come from a reading of these stories is that they seem to be part of a wider accepted 'truism' that too much success too young is damaging and is, paradoxically, actually the antithesis of good luck. This would appear to be part of the Protestant work ethic which dominates the attitude to economic life in large parts of Western society. This concept reinforces the belief that hard work over a substantial period of time is the only morally acceptable way to achieve financial security and success. Furthermore, it is the only way in which, once achieved, it is possible to relax and enjoy it, in the full knowledge that the 'price' for success has been paid up front in terms of hours worked and sacrifices made. For this reason the economic success of child stars may be one of the reasons they can so easily be held up as objects of scorn and derision in the media and why there seems to be such a feeling of schadenfreude about their downfalls.

The attribution of all and any ills which befall former child stars to their early success whilst ignoring any other factors which may have contributed to their misfortune is another common technique used to reinforce the idea that there is a curse on child stars and further naturalises the idea that there is a direct cause/effect correlation between child stardom and adult disaster. This is evident in the following extracts in which automatic associations are made between child stardom and a whole range of possibly unrelated problems later in life:

How starring in Mary Poppins led to the death of the supercalifragilistic boy. (The Mail on Sunday 24.10.04)

It was a classic case of too much too young. At Dundee sheriff court yesterday, the former child star of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, now an eco-warrior, faced down her family's bid to evict her from her home...Following in the long line of children scarred by success in Hollywood, Heather Ripley, 39, found herself in court, trying to hold on to the villa she rents from a trust fund set up by her grandfather. (The Guardian, 10.08.99)

Lena Zavaroni, who has died aged 34, epitomised the potentially traumatic effects of child stardom. (The Guardian, 5.10.99)

After the success of Pass the Dutchie, Patrick Waite, 15, from Musical Youth, had a nervous breakdown, turned to drugs and eventually died at the age of 24 from a head injury while serving time in jail. (Sunday Herald Sun (Australia) 24.10.99)

Coleman, now 34, earned an estimated \$18million as the star of that top-rated sitcom, but had been reduced to working as a \$7 an hour movie set security guard a few years ago. (abcnews.com 3.09.02)

The above quotes encourage us to feel pity for former child stars by emphasising their powerlessness in the 'adult' world in contrast to the 'illicit' power they had as children. Again the message is clearly that early success is dangerous and such stories serve as thinly veiled warnings as to the consequences of having 'too much too young'.

The specific vocabulary employed to describe child stars also works to create a sense of impending doom for those who enter the world of child stardom. For example, the use of the terms 'survivors' and 'casualties' in the following extracts implies that child stardom is a danger to life and limb:

Musical Youth were the pop phenomenon of 1982, a group of five British children who sold millions of records and became the first black group to appear on MTV. Soon though their success began to unravel...The band's survivors talk to Alex Petridis. (The Guardian 21.03.03)

The road of the child pop star is littered with casualties – will S Club 8, current top of the tots, be different? (Guardian Weekend 27.09.03)

Unfortunately, what has often gone with child stardom is adult self-destruction. The latest casualty is Danny Bonaduce, once of the Partridge Family, who was fired from his job as a LA radio host last month after yet another trip to rehab. (The Times T2 28.07.05)

The implication in these pieces that show business is a battle ground where only the toughest survive highlights both the inappropriateness of children being there and characterises those that are as victims who are part of a hostile environment which they are ill prepared to deal with.

In order to ensure that the depiction of the former child star as a cursed victim of early success is the dominant cultural image of this group, certain infamous 'horror stories' are told again and again in the press which create the impression that death and disaster amongst those that found success early in life is much more widespread than is actually the case.

To this ends, selective mini-biographies of child stars who have had miserable experiences are often referred to as 'proof' that the curse is real. For example this extract is taken from an article about Robert Iler a young American actor after he had been arrested for his role in a robbery in Manhattan and is entitled 'Oh no – not another one':

American TV will make a good kid bad in no time flat. Take Butch Patrick, who played Eddie Munster. He racked up a hefty rap sheet as a juvenile delinquent before straightening himself out. Or child star Patty Duke, whose adult life has been filled with drug abuse. Then we had Mackenzie Phillips...who was a hot-headed drug-abuser during her sojourn on the 1970s sitcom *One Day at a Time*, and Danny Bonaduce, whose clean-cut image as the Partridge Family's freckled ginger-haired drummer was tarnished after coke busts, and particularly after he beat up a transvestite hooker in a New York Alleyway. No fewer than three child stars sank either into ignominy or an early grave on the family values sitcom *Diff'rent Strokes*. (The Guardian 13.07.01)

Given the unquestionably awful stories about some former child stars, it seems that a generalisation has occurred which has become the stock stereotype of this group and which has become naturalised and accepted as 'common sense' knowledge. As Hamilton and Troler (1986) found in their research into prejudice and discrimination, due to limits to our

cognitive processing capacity, social information is generally organised and simplified around a set of cognitive categories and thus; ‘social categories quickly become a focus for an associated baggage of beliefs, thoughts and value judgements about the people within the category.’ (Quoted in Wetherell and Potter 1992:38)

The above analysis has identified the main techniques by which newspaper articles facilitate and perpetuate a certain image of the child star as powerless, pitiful and cursed which can be understood as the cultural expression of the ‘beliefs, thoughts and judgements’ which surround this social group. These techniques are:

1. The sensationalist reporting of the misdemeanours of former child stars.
2. The ‘shocked surprise’ reactions to former child stars who have not had negative experiences in adult life.
3. The framing of child stardom as a perilous experience which ‘sensible’ (ie middle-class) parents keep their children away from.
4. The extensive and indiscriminate use of the hyperbolic term ‘child star’.
5. The arbitrary references to the superstitious belief that success must be ‘paid for’ either by hard work or bad luck.
6. The attribution of all negative adult experiences in a former child star’s life to their early success.
7. The use of specific vocabulary which identifies child stars as powerless victims
8. The re-telling of stories which embody the image of the ‘child star gone wrong’ on which the whole discourse is based.

It seems clear that the value judgements around child stars are overwhelmingly negative and that their lives and experiences are reduced in newspaper articles in order to fit in with the well established image of the child star which we expect and feel comfortable with. Such stereotyping can of course become self-perpetuating – for as Hamilton and Troler note, instances of behaviour which confirm to the stereotype will be more memorable than disconfirming instances and this is clear from the selective reporting of ‘shocking’ former child star stories evident in the press.

However, useful though Hamilton and Trolie's ideas are in explaining how the stereotype of the cursed child star is normalised and naturalised in the media, social cognition research such as theirs cannot account for the importance of analysing the history of ideas and categorisation in understanding the ideology which underpins social discourse.

Indeed, when contemporary media stories about child stars are compared with those of fifty and a hundred years ago it becomes evident that today's construction is both the product of the past and a reaction against it. The idea of the cursed child star is by no means universal or 'natural' despite the strong normalising influence of the current dominant discourse. Rather, the concept that early success in show business has damning consequences has a history that is firmly attached to wider shifting attitudes towards children and childhood and to the extraordinary developments in media and technology over the twentieth century.

If we look at Victorian publications such as *Interlude* or *The Music Hall and Theatre* which include interviews and feature articles on a wide variety of actors, singers and miscellaneous entertainers who appeared on stage across Britain and America at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, a very different attitude towards child performers is evident. Instead of viewing early success as a precursor to disaster in adulthood, it seems that the Victorian stance was rather more encouraging, with adult success in the theatre seen as a reward for hard work during childhood. For example, the front page of the weekly published *Interlude* always highlighted a popular performer and gave a biography of their rise to success. From these texts it is clear that being a child performer was seen as an almost essential precursor to a life on the stage. For example, the following extract from 1886 on the singer Miss Florrie Robina praises her 'persistent effort' and celebrates her hard won 'unbounded success':

In professional, as in all other phases of life, success is only attained after a long and weary struggle...In the case of Miss Robina, it has been only after years of toil and persistent effort that she has attained her present position. At the early age of five years she first trod the boards at Thornton's Varieties, Leeds....During her provincial tour she was booked for a return visit wherever she played and in the Metropolis also her success has been most decided. (*Interlude* 16.01.1886)

A similar admiration of youthful courage and perseverance is evident in a feature on the dancer and singer Miss Alice Conway:

Her first appearance before the public was made when she was but eight years of age, on the boards of the old Grecian Theatre, London. At the age of fifteen she had so developed her talent for dancing, that she, with a pluck and precocity beyond her years, took in hand, and in a perfectly capable way, taught a ballet at the Theatre Royal, Greenwich....We have little doubt that Miss Conway will have a very prosperous future, for she shows an amount of originality that, sooner or later, is bound to win for her a very prominent place in the regard of the general public. (Interlude 27.02.1886)

That Miss Conway could look forward to an attitude of high regard of the general public is in stark contrast to the ridicule and pity many of today's former child stars endure when they attempt to continue their careers into adulthood. It is also interesting to note that Conway's 'pluck and precocity beyond her years' is cast here as a positive attribute, whereby any precocity in childhood is currently seen as generally unpleasant, threatening as it does the carefully constructed boundaries that we have set up around childhood in the period between then and now. Indeed, it would seem that the idea of the curse of the child star only makes sense in our contemporary social context in which childhood is idealised as a protected space under adult control and regulation. In the Victorian era, although such social values were already fairly well established in middle class homes, they were certainly not seen as applicable to all children regardless of class and social position. That is to say, 'childhood' as a socially constructed category was still in the process of becoming universalised and as such there was much more flexibility in the range of childhoods which were both available and acceptable. The very idea of being 'damaged' by one's childhood experiences was, pre-Freud, also a largely non-existent concept in Victorian society and so it is not surprising that this discourse was not drawn on in their descriptions of the lives of former child performers.

As described in a previous chapter, with the focus on child welfare and education and the idealisation of childhood which grew and grew throughout the twentieth century – the so-called century of the child - social attitudes towards child performers also changed and developed. The angelic cinemoppets of 1920s - 1940s Hollywood were not seen as cursed,

but blessed. The child star became the embodiment of the perfect child, the visual evidence of the symbolic value of innocence and purity which could so easily be pinned on to a child's image. There was no hint of a curse for these children; if anything theirs was predicted to be a charmed life, as in this celebration of child star Margaret O'Brien:

A miniature acting genius, she is still a small-fry representative who wears two smooth, brown braids down her back, draws pictures by following with a pencil the numbers from one to two to three and loves to play a screen role that "chokes her throat"...Margaret is just six...Her tiny face is ethereal in its glowing sensitiveness. Her gestures, especially when she speaks of the play she's writing – well, printing – well, just "making up" as she finally amends with her two small arms circling gracefully in the air – bespeak the artist that Margaret will one day become. (Jefferson in Photoplay August 1943)

However, as the disastrous private lives of stars such as Jackie Coogan and Judy Garland became public knowledge, and the first generation of child TV stars in America had their fair share of drug abuse and scandal in the 1960s, the child star was suddenly seen as an oddity and a misfit who challenged not only escapist fantasies of the magical world of movies and TV, but also the carefully constructed image of the innocent and obedient family centred child which had become so ubiquitous in post war Britain and America.

Thus the myth of the curse of child stardom began to gain currency as it reinforced both the ideal of childhood as a private, family oriented time of life separate from the adult world of work and responsibility, and also the concept of there being a right and a wrong kind of childhood, with transgressions into adult territory being punishable by the loss of the protection that the veneer of childhood innocence provides. In this sense the 'curse' serves to reinforce our current dominant beliefs and values about childhood and can also be seen as a reaction against the more generalised fear that children today are becoming too powerful, too knowing and are growing up too fast. In order to preserve our nostalgic vision of childhood as a time of innocence and preternatural wisdom, those who step across the boundaries of childhood are dealt with harshly, and child stars are no exception. Indeed, other than perhaps royal children or children who commit or are victims of heinous crimes or battle terrible diseases against the odds, the only children who really enter our adult mainstream media are child stars. Our treatment of them in the media, I would argue,

demonstrates much about the status of childhood more generally in our society. The shared consensus that child stars are damned from the start indicates an underlying confusion about what we want children to do and be, and a determination to exercise the power that we, as adults, have over them and which it is in our interests to protect.

However, although the idea that successful child performers are cursed in adult life is a dominant one in the current discourse which constructs the category of the 'child star', there appear to be certain exceptions to the rule which challenge the strength and 'taken for grantedness' of this concept. For example, children who demonstrate great sporting talent, or who are gifted classical musicians tend not to be publicly endowed with the same 'curse'. Nor do children who are taking only their first steps towards success and whose accomplishments are documented by their local newspapers. In such cases these youngsters' achievements are celebrated rather than derided, with articles focussing only on the positive aspects of the experiences for their local 'lad or lass':

It must be the dream of every child who aspires to an acting career to star in a television drama that everyone is talking about. For Radlett schoolgirl Emily Cantor-Davis the dream has come true.
(The Borehamwood Times 24.04.02)

More than 12 million television viewers rode a rollercoaster of emotions on Sunday night all thanks to child star Nick Robinson who shone as Willie Beech in the heart-wrenching Goodnight Mister Tom.
(The Hendon Times 31.10.98)

A talented youngster from Walthamstow is set to star at the Palace Theatre in the smash hit musical Les Miserables. Luke Marson, 12, of Salop Road, Walthamstow, will play the role of Gavorche, the child lead. (The Walthamstow Times, 12.07.01)

A budding child star is jumping for joy after landing a role in the latest Andrew Lloyd Webber production. Eight year old Tosh Wanogho... was one of 20 children picked from 350 entrants to perform in Whistle Down the Wind. (The Wandsworth Guardian, 18.04.98)

Even the possibility of being catapulted into mega stardom is seen as a completely risk free adventure, as evident in the following quote from a local Edinburgh newspaper about the open auditions that were held in the city to find the lead child star for *Grey Friars Bobby* :

A spokeswoman for Scottish Screen, which has committed £500,000 of lottery money to the film's £5 million budget, said it was a great opportunity for an unknown child to become a household name. "Look what happened to Macaulay Culkin in *Home Alone*," she said. "These open auditions give children a huge chance to become involved in the film industry, and who knows where it might lead." (Edinburgh Evening News 24.10.02)

This rather different attitude towards child stars in local newspapers seems to indicate that the child who is still on the margins of success or is involved in more local based entertainment projects is still subject to the protection and encouragement which is seen as appropriate for 'normal' children. As the child moves away from the private, family realm and into the public domain with increasing popularity and success such niceties seem to disappear. As the child star creates a position for him/herself in the wider society their threat to the rules governing the rightful place of children becomes evident and the power of the media to cast a lifelong shadow on their lives is activated.

Another example of child stars who seem to have so far avoided, or at least been predicted to avoid, the 'curse' in adult life by the national press are the stars of the phenomenally successful *Harry Potter* films (2000, 2002, 2004, 2005) based on the best selling novels by author J.K Rowling. The saving graces of the three main characters played by Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint and Emma Watson seem to be more about being 'naturals' with 'supportive parents' than about avoiding success and celebrity altogether. Analysed in more detail it becomes apparent that there is another element to the supposed universal curse of the child star which has more to do with social class than cosmic justice. As Walkerdine (1997) observed in her study of the representations of little girls in film, the aspirational power of a life in show business for poorly educated working class children, girls especially, is immense and the fact that child stars have historically been associated with the working class goes some way to explaining why they are held in low esteem by society at large.

In a thinly disguised contempt of this supposedly predominantly working class aspiration to escape a mediocre life by 'making it' in show business, Chris Columbus and John Boorman, the directors of the *Harry Potter* films were, we are told,

determined to avoid seeing the usual line-up of tap-dancing hopefuls.
(The Observer, 27.08.00)

In fact, Daniel Radcliffe, who plays Harry was only cast following 'a chance encounter' with Columbus at a West End film premier with his literary agent father and casting director mother. A meeting which surely could have happened to any 10 year old....

Boorman's description of Daniel as a 'lovely kid' with a 'natural manner' distances him from the stereotypical precocious child star and as a final defence against the 'curse' Daniel's mother and father are clearly demarcated from the pushy parents of the working class wannabes who will stop at nothing to get their child in front of the camera:

The most important thing when you're casting children is to make sure you cast the parents, and his parents are excellent people. They're aware of the pressures but they're also very protective, without being pushy. I like them very much. (The Guardian, 27.08.00)

This subtle approval of discretion and modesty in child stars and their families can be seen as a modern day expression of the cult of naturalness which has characterised desirable performances by children since the Victorian era and which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter in terms of its relation to ideal tenets of childhood.

So it seems that not being too successful and/or being middle-class may offer some protection from being branded a 'has-been' as an adult, although only time will tell if the public admiration for the child stars of the *Harry Potter* films will turn sour or not as they grow up and away from the roles which made them famous.

This section of analysis has described how a stereotyped convention of the lives of child stars has been created through the way in which the press structures and frames stories

about such individuals. I have argued that by perpetuating the myth that there is a ‘curse’ on the future happiness of child stars the media works to reinforce shared normative standards relating to the behaviour and experiences that are acceptable for children. In this way the stories serve to protect the ideal of childhood as a special, protected place for all children, which, if left too early, will have devastating consequences for those concerned. I have also noted several exceptions to the cursed child star rule which challenge the strength of the concept which, as we will see in the next section, has been so powerful in shaping people’s expectations of child stars and has often reduced their lives to a set of narrative conventions from which the individual struggles to escape.

In the following sub-section I will explore in more detail the kinds of behaviours which count as transgressions against childhood as evident in the stories analysed and examine some theoretical explanations as to why the very category ‘child star’ is inherently challenging to the formal structure of our society.

5.1.2 Transgression and Punishment

Although the preceding analysis describes how child stars are stereotyped in the print media as being somehow damaged or cursed by their early success, it does not satisfactorily address the question of why this social group should be castigated in such a way. In order to explain this issue there has to be an understanding of why contemporary child stars generate such negative reactions in the media and what exactly it is about them which apparently so offends the sensibilities of the general public.

This section will redress that balance by examining the fundamentally transgressive status of the child star in relation to the specific classification system on which our culture is based. Using Mary Douglas’s theory of pollution and taboo as described in *Purity and Danger* (1966), I demonstrate the anomalous and therefore dangerous, social status of child stars, and explore the sanctions used to punish such individuals who are conceptualised as a threat to the social order.

With reference to the work of Van Gennep and Turner I go on to explain how child stars also challenge the conventional rites of passage which are an intrinsic element of the journey into adulthood in all cultures and thus set themselves up as permanently stigmatised individuals.

Although Douglas and Van Gennep derived their theories from structuralist anthropological fieldwork and so may appear somewhat incongruous with the overall approach of discourse analysis which characterises this chapter, their work is actually extremely relevant to understanding why child stars are constructed as powerless in our culture. The universal social classification methods described by such anthropologists provide useful tools in identifying culturally and historically specific categorisations into which social groups are defined as anomalous and why at certain times and in certain places. By conceptualising the 'child star' as a distinct category within a whole system of meaning in this way it is possible to identify the cultural boundaries which define and confine the group and to describe the discursive formations through which the child star is constructed as deviant. As such, anthropological readings of contemporary data can offer important insights into how dominant discourses are reinforced through media texts which are embedded with cultural meanings and shared values.

5.1.3 *The Child Star and the Boundaries of Childhood*

Jenks defines transgression as 'that conduct which breaks rules or exceeds boundaries' (2003:3) and explains how transgressive acts serve to reaffirm the social order by confirming that limits are in place and by delineating where the boundaries of acceptable behaviour lie.

Child stars are then, by their very status as children in an exalted 'adult' position, transgressing the boundaries of childhood in our society and through that transgression they function to confirm the shared consensus as to where the boundaries of childhood should be. The difference of child stars to 'normal' children can thus be understood as the essence of both their power as icons of the potentiality of childhood, and more relevantly for this chapter, their powerlessness as transgressive persons who have disturbed the social order.

The historical association of 'normal' with morally 'good' renders those who deviate from the 'normal' as going against the established moral order and this fundamental tainting of child stars due to their 'abnormal' status has traditionally called for some kind of social punishment to be administered. As Douglas asserts the harsh treatment of transgressors is a vital part of the protection of the whole community, be it primitive or modern:

When the community is attacked from outside at least the external danger fosters solidarity within. When it is attacked from within by wanton individuals, they can be punished and the structure publicly affirmed. (1984:140)

As demonstrated in the preceding section the punishment meted out to those 'wanton' transgressors of childhood, child stars, is to be 'cursed' in adult life. Whether or not this is actually the case (and one would assume that most people in Western society would not really believe that it is) what is important is that there appears to be a punishment of these transgressors, and even more importantly that there is a shared affirmation as to the rightness of such a punishment being both acceptable and predictable for such individuals. In this sense the transgression of the child star is used in their media constructions to justify and explain any bad experiences in later life which then become defined as punishments for their earlier transgressions.

The 'child star' then becomes a dangerous category in terms of its relation to the boundaries of social order. Indeed, if we accept that meaning is created through opposites - i.e. that which *is* defines that which *is not* and vice versa - then the term 'child star' can be seen to derive its meaning from its distinction both from 'adult star' and simply 'child'. In relation to the reinforcement and recreation of the category 'child' it would appear that child stars are defined by their difference to 'normal' children, thus emphasising what is consensually agreed to be acceptable and therefore 'natural' behaviour for children.

Therefore, the behaviour of child stars which is selected to appear in media stories is of the most shocking kind, generally involving either precocious sexuality or drug abuse which serves to further alienate the child star from the 'normal' child. For example, the members

of failed pre-teen pop group Breze caused outrage in the press because of the way their appearance was sexualised by a misguided management team:

They sing provocatively, wear make-up and tattoos – and are aged between nine and eleven....Although the band is energetic and enthusiastic, the girls have been filmed swaying their underdeveloped hips in an effort to appear sexy. (Sunday Herald Sun Australia 24.10.99)

and Charlotte Church shocked her former fans when:

she was pictured holidaying in Hawaii wearing a T-shirt bearing the offensive slogan 'Barbie is a crack whore. (The Mail on Sunday 04.05.03)

Drug abuse is also something that 'normal' children do not become involved in. The following quotes highlight the incredulity surrounding the behaviour of these children and lament the corrupting influence of fame on childhood innocence:

(She) was arrested in the show's third season for cocaine possession. Left and returned several times. Fell asleep during rehearsals, refused to take drug tests, and reportedly appeared incoherent at points. (abcnews.com, 3.09.02)

(Drew Barrymore) entered a rehab clinic at the age of 13 to fight drug and alcohol abuse. In one episode, she swiped her mother's credit card and hopped on a plane to the West Coast with the intention of continuing on to Hawaii. She was apprehended by private investigators in Los Angeles and led back to rehab in handcuffs. (abcnews.com, 3.09.02)

She was smoking grass at 10, addicted to cocaine at 13, and went from child parts to trashy movies like Poison Ivy. (The Observer, 1.10.00)

Other criminal or outlandish behaviour by child stars also gets highlighted in the press as further evidence of the dangers of achieving too much too young:

(Macaulay Culkin) sued his father, scrawled graffiti in his New York apartment, and dyed his hair blue. (abcnews.com, 3.09.02)

Pity poor Robert Iler...He was arrested last week for his (allegedly passive) role in the robbery of two Brazilian tourists in Manhattan. If found guilty, Iler may soon join the ranks of American child stars who made it big and blew it. (The Guardian, 13.07.01)

What does this tell us about the boundaries of acceptable behaviour of children in our society? At face value, nothing very surprising; they shouldn't drink alcohol or take drugs, they shouldn't steal, they shouldn't behave in a 'sexy' way, they shouldn't go against their parents' authority, they shouldn't display any 'unnatural' additions or changes to their bodies. Yet the sensationalised reporting can be seen as symptomatic of wider fears about children out of control, who are beyond adult authority and are therefore a dangerous challenge to the status quo and a threat to adult authority. It is little wonder such children are vilified, highlighting as they do, latent weaknesses in our social order and potential deformities in our methods of socialisation.

Hand in hand with the reinforcement of collective ideals as to approvable conduct of children in general go the social consequences for this group of children of having such behaviour publicly exposed. These are, in essence, transgressive behaviours which expel the proponent from the category of 'child' and thus from the protection which membership of that category grants – the individual is thus stigmatised because he or she has been seen to blatantly discard the innocence which is so fundamental to our current construction of the child.

However, as referred to above, the concept of transgression in relation to child stars is not just relevant in terms of the deviant behaviour of a few such children off screen. It also describes the very status of being a child star - effectively a child who has crossed the fundamental line between childhood and adulthood by working, being economically independent and by having a career without having reached adulthood either chronologically or having passed through the liminal stage of adolescence. Such a position cannot be held to be deviant in the same way as, say, a child taking drugs is, and yet it is a transgression of a crucial social boundary in our society and as such renders the

transgressor in a dangerous zone of ambiguity somewhere between childhood and adulthood.

The next chapter will consider in detail the status of ambiguous beings such as child stars on a psychoanalytic level, but for the purposes of this chapter the discussion will be limited to ideas of social transgression and polluted persons and will consider how child stars fall into such a category, and how, if ever, they escape.

In order to gain a wider perspective on the ways in which societies protect their boundaries by categorisation and shared normative standards it is useful to consider anthropological approaches to the concept of transgression. In her analysis of universal concepts of pollution and taboo as evident in primitive and modern societies Douglas concluded that:

Any given system of classification must give rise to anomalies and any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions. It cannot ignore the anomalies which its scheme produces...(therefore) we find in any culture...various provision for dealing with ambiguous or anomalous events. (Douglas 1984:39)

Douglas lists the five most common ways in which anomalous events are dealt with in both primitive and modern societies:

1. By labelling an event (for example a monstrous birth) as of a peculiar kind thus restoring categories of normality.
2. By physically controlling the anomaly (for example, the practice in some primitive societies of killing twins at birth)
3. By having a rule of avoiding anomalous things thereby strengthening the definitions to which they do not conform.
4. By labelling anomalous events as dangerous, thereby putting the subject beyond dispute and helping to enforce conformity.

5. By using ambiguous symbols in ritual for the same ends as they are used in poetry and mythology – to enrich meaning or to call attention to other levels of existence.

She goes on to explain that all societies are subject to the same rules although in primitive cultures they work with a greater force and total comprehensiveness, whereas in modern societies they tend to apply to ‘disjointed, separate areas of existence.’ (1984:40)

In this sense then, it would seem that the child star could be described as an ‘anomalous event’ in the scheme of normalised parent/child relations in our society, and that as such is subject to some of the interpretations outlined above, which are intended to restore and return social order by either castigating or celebrating the identified anomaly. For example, child stars are frequently characterised as ‘peculiar’ (1) due to their unusual experiences in childhood which take them beyond the expected realms of home and school, and dangerous (4) in terms of both their association with precocious sexuality and their apparent vulnerability to addiction and disaster in adult life.

Thus potentially we can conceptualise child stars as occupying one of the disjointed, separate areas of existence to which such rules still apply in modern society and therefore understand more clearly the reason they are subject to such undermining stereotyping and derision in the media, as well as being reified and celebrated for their talents and ‘specialness’.

According to Douglas, all societies have sanctions for those polluting persons who cross physical or social lines which must be respected according to shared normative standards, and the enforcement of these sanctions, in whatever form they may take, protects the social order. Therefore, it is not possible to interpret pollution rules in isolation and without reference to the wider culture they emanate from, because:

the only way in which pollution ideas make sense is in reference to a total structure of thought whose key-stone, boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation. (1966:41)

This would suggest that it is only possible to understand why child stars are treated as they are in the media by examining wider norms relating to adulthood and childhood in our culture, and the social boundaries which separate the two.

Also writing from an anthropological perspective, Van Gennep (1960) considers the symbolic concept of boundary to be central to human and social experience. He asserts that due to the emotional and practical difficulties associated with movement across boundaries they can only properly be crossed by passing through 'transitional states' which are always, at some level, about death and rebirth, such as the adolescent rites de passage. Transitions are by default transgressive as they are always a step into the unknown and away from the boundaries of the old life. Van Gennep claims that transitional states are also fraught with danger because;

transition is neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others. The danger is controlled by ritual which precisely separates him from his old status, segregates him for a time, and then publicly declares his entry to his new status. (Van Gennep 1960:97)

So, the child star finds him or herself in a state outside of the formal structure which is 'indefinable' and which is dangerous not only for their own identity and survival but also for the identities of others. If a child is supporting their entire family through their earnings, where does that leave the status of their parents? If a child has a manager, a stylist and an agent to advise him or her, what place is there for the authority of their parents? If a child already has a successful career where is the need for education? If a child has automatically been granted the status of an adult what does that say about the necessity of the transitional state of adolescence? Fundamentally, if a child can *be* an adult what does that say about the 'natural' right of power over children that adults have bestowed upon themselves? Seen in this light the child star is a dangerous person indeed, challenging the intrinsic legitimacy of the balance of power in our society. There is no way such children can be allowed to 'get away' with that! If they have missed out on the rite of passage to adulthood the first time round, then they had better prove they have made

amends for that by going through some kind of identity crisis or publicly shared trauma in later years if they want to be accepted as full members of society.

This can be seen as the ‘marginal period’ which Douglas describes as an essential part of the rehabilitation process for those on the outskirts of society, such as ex-prisoners, but which also seems relevant for former child stars, who find themselves in a social wilderness as adults, (or who at least are perceived as being in a social wilderness by the wider society due to media manipulation of their stories):

During the marginal period which separates ritual dying and ritual rebirth, the novices in initiation are temporarily outcast. For the duration of the rite they have no place in society. (1966:96)

Turner (1974) calls this ‘in-between’ stage ‘liminality’ and describes it as similar to being in a tunnel with its hidden nature and mysterious darkness. The individual liminar who is travelling through this stage is marked out by their ambiguity whereby; ‘Their image is hazy, they occupy a cultural miasma rather than any identifiable class or fixed position. They are, in the well worn phrase, ‘neither one thing nor t’other’. (Jenks 2003:44)

The media fascination with the child star who occupies the liminal zone between childhood and adulthood is demonstrated in the following newspaper profile of Hayley Mills from the 1960s:

There is still a lot of child left in her face, but the woman in her is beginning to take over. Her lips have taken on a fullness that wasn’t there last summer. She has learned a few five-dollar swear words, but her voice, like some nostalgic echo, occasionally returns to the fifth form and the sound of playgrounds. She can handle the kind of drink you need a licence to sell. She smokes. (Daily Express 13.01.66 quoted in Williams 2005:365)

It is this ambiguity within the symbolic system of meaning, rather than being outside of meaning altogether, which characterises the child star’s status as being forever caught between childhood and adulthood, as encapsulated in the following quote:

Nearly 20 years after first bursting into the charts, pop recluse Roddy Frame is still trying to shake off his 'boy wonder' tag. (The Sun 22.08.02)

It is clearly within the interest of the media to perpetuate this ambiguity as those who defy the 'natural' order are in general much more interesting than those who adhere to the 'rules', and those that fall between childhood and adulthood hold a particular fascination for a culture in which the boundaries between these states are constantly being challenged and rewritten. The irony of the above quote in pitying Frame for not being able to 'shake off' his 'boy wonder' tag even after a long period of marginality as a 'recluse', whilst at the same time reinforcing and reawakening the label for a whole new generation of potential fans demonstrates perfectly the powerlessness of the child star to control his or her public image. Once a child star, it seems, always a child star.

The next section explores the lifelong stigma attached to having been a child star and the powerlessness of the individual to fully break free of the transgressive identity afforded them. As will be seen, concepts of marginality and liminality are key themes in the ways in which former child stars describe and justify their experiences and attempt to claim the transition into wisdom which comes with the status of full adulthood. As will be demonstrated, supposed primitive beliefs in the attribution of misfortune to breaches of social norms are powerful features of the self narratives of this group. This suggests that the idea of the 'curse of the child star' as constructed by the media, has also been internalised by those labelled as such and that the knowledge that one is perceived to have missed out or skipped a vital transitional stage can have powerful repercussions on the personal and social identity constructions of individuals.

5.2 The Individual Response to Being Stigmatised as a Former Child Star

The aim of this chapter so far has been to explore the ways in which the media creates a stereotypical identity for child stars and former child stars which limits and defines them socially, professionally and personally and which they are powerless to control. The process by which such a negative image is normalised and naturalised through the ways that child stars and former child stars are written about and commented on in the press has

been demonstrated and is characterised by the reductionist idea of there being a curse on child stars. This idea has been explained as a form of social punishment for the dual transgressions of stepping over the accepted boundaries of childhood and for growing up and away from the ideal image of childhood that they once embodied.

Having established the culturally specific construction of the child star as a transgressive and ambiguous category, the remainder of this chapter will examine the response of the individuals who fall into this category to such a potentially damaging definition of their identity. Through an analysis of autobiographies and interviews with former child stars gleaned from a variety of sources, it has been possible to discern certain techniques and patterns in the way they describe and explain their experiences which can be understood as a direct response to the challenge to their identity posed by the stereotypical image of the child star. As Wetherell and Potter explain, discourse analysis is particularly useful for illuminating the social and cultural context of an individual's speech by examining how and why they are saying what they are saying:

Discourse analysis focuses, above all, on quintessentially psychological activities – activities of justification, rationalisation, categorisation, attribution, making-sense, naming, blaming and identifying. (1992:2)

Discourse analysis links these activities with collective forms of social action, thus generating the potential to integrate psychological concerns with social analysis – an approach which is essential to understanding the interface between the lived experience of being a child star/former child star and the stereotypical concept of the child star, which has enough 'practical adequacy' to have become an established shorthand for how such individuals are regarded and treated.

It is this gap between a person's social identity and their individual identity which Erving Goffman explored in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity* (1963), themes from which are used to structure the following analysis. Goffman's central thesis is that stigma is intimately related with stereotype, and that the way stigmatised individuals are responded to by others is concerned mainly with the individual's deviance from the norm and not with other aspects of his or her life or personality.

Although not stigmatised in a commonly understood way such as through disfigurement or criminal behaviour, I would argue that this focus on the unusual aspect of an individual in informing response is an overriding characteristic of the experience of the child star and as such renders being a former child star a stigma and thus creates a need for strategies of acceptance to be employed. Just as the individual who has suffered from mental illness has to deal with the stigma of having been in a psychiatric hospital, the former child star has to deal with the stigma of having been a famous and successful youngster.

Beginning with an exploration of the effect of stigma on social identity in relation to the child star, I will go on to examine strategies of information control and how group alignment and self identity is achieved in the interviews and autobiographical accounts analysed.

5.2.1 Stigma and Social Identity

The stark reality of constantly living with the stigma of being a former child star and the powerlessness felt in the face of the situation is eloquently explained in the following quotes from Macaulay Culkin and Gary Coleman:

I wanted people to forget that that whole thing had ever happened. So I could finally walk down the street and buy a bunch of bananas. Or something like that. Because that was something I could not do without someone looking, or someone taking a picture, or somebody reminding me of what was happening. Or what did happen. (Culkin in *The Face Magazine*, November 2002)

There's nothing I can do – it's public domain. People have the right under the federal government to joke about me or my situation or my name or anything about me. I can't stop that. (Coleman in Ryan 2000:8)

According to Goffman, this shameful gap between virtual and actual social identity, that is to say the way in which one wants to be perceived and the way in which one is actually perceived, constitutes the central feature of a stigmatised individual's life. Acceptance into

the dominant social group becomes an overriding desire for many and can often be identified as the underlying objective of interviews and autobiographies of former child stars as the individual struggles to distance him or herself from their childhood self.²

Goffman uses the term stigma to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting, although this is a social definition as 'an attribute is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself rather a stigma is 'a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype.' (1990:14)

In this light it seems possible that former child stars are 'discredited' due to their past success as an embodiment of childhood ideals which they no longer possess. That which they were celebrated for, in a very real sense, no longer exists, exposing not only their shortcomings in growing up and away from their child selves, but the shortcomings of the whole idea of childhood perfection. They are thus in danger of appearing as charlatans, fakes, unusual, unwanted, roleless members of society who have exploited and then stolen something which is held fundamentally dear to the collective consciousness - the redemptive qualities of the innocent child.

To be stigmatised then becomes:

the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance. (Goffman 1990:9)

and even more devastating to the individual's construction of identity:

By definition...we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. (1990:15)

² Although for others the complete rejection of society or a retreat into a fantasy world becomes their coping strategy. For example, the extraordinary lifestyle of Michael Jackson would seem to fit this pattern.

The bewildering reality of such a challenge to one's sense of self is explained by Goffman as a constant source of angst to the stigmatised individual who is well aware of the expected normative standards of the society they live in:

The stigmatised individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that we do; this is a pivotal fact. His deepest feelings about what he is may be his sense of being a 'normal person', a human being like anyone else, a person, therefore, who deserves a fair chance and a fair break....Yet he may perceive, usually quite correctly, that whatever others profess, they do not really 'accept' him and are not ready to make contact with him on 'equal grounds'. Further, the standards he had incorporated from the wider society equip him to be intimately alive to what others see as his failing, inevitably causing him, if only for moments, to agree that he does indeed fall short of what he really ought to be. Shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual's perception of one of his own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess, and one he can readily see himself as not possessing. (1990:18)

The defiling attribute which seems to cause shame to the former child star is not only the child stardom itself, but more acutely, the failure to live up to such levels of success in adult life. As a former member of the high profile British kids reggae group of the 1980s called 'Musical Youth' explains, the shift in social status involved in growing away from your success is hard to bear:

I had to sign on when the money ran out. People were looking at me and laughing, but I had to do it. (Dennis Seaton in *The Guardian* 21.03.03)

and a former child star of American TV points out that:

It's not easy when you've been at the pinnacle of your career at eleven. (Johnny Whitaker quoted in Ryan 2000:75)

The personal issue that many former child stars have to face of dealing with a loss of fame, success and/or credibility is thus exacerbated further by the embarrassment felt at having everyone around them also aware of their fall from grace. Goffman describes the issue of management of information by stigmatised persons as crucial due to the discomfort engendered by such experiences of social shame:

To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when and where. (Goffman 1990:57)

However, questions as to whom you reveal to, when and how much (for non physical stigma), are clearly not an option for very well known former child stars – the information is physically embodied in their resemblance to their childhood self, and socially available due to their reputation and their famous name. Goffman describes the complicated stigma of fame in relation to information control thus:

Where an individual has a public image, it seems to be constituted from a small selection of facts which may be true of him, which facts are inflated into a dramatic and newsworthy appearance, and then used as a full picture of him. In consequence a special type of stigmatisation can occur. The figure the individual cuts in daily life before those with whom he has routine dealings is likely to be dwarfed and spoiled by virtual demands (whether favourable or unfavourable) created by his public image. This seems especially to occur when the individual is no longer engaged in newsworthy larger events and must everywhere face being received as someone who no longer is what he once was. (1990:91)

This double edged nature of fame is summed up by Macaulay Culkin:

When you're put in this position, you can get into any restaurant you want without a reservation, but while you're there everyone is staring at you shove food in your mouth. (The Face, November 2002)

He explains how even small things can be used by the media to reinforce stigma, in his case of him being a rebellious child and a 'weirdo':

In his teens he dyed his hair, at home, himself, because he'd never dyed it before, and wanted to. 'The next thing I know, it's on the cover of People magazine,' he says. 'I dyed my hair – it was a cover story. (The Face, November 2002)

The powerlessness of the former child star to control his or her public image seems to be an on-going source of stress and frustration. In Goffman's terms such individuals have been 'discredited' and must take some form of social action in order to be fully reaccepted into society.

5.2.2 Spoiled or Spoilt? Group Alignment and Ego Identity

It has been suggested that the stigmatised individual defines himself as no different from any other human being, while at the same time he and those around him define him as someone set apart. Given this basic self-contradiction of the stigmatised individual it is understandable that he will make some effort to find a way out of his dilemma, if only to find a doctrine which makes consistent sense out of his situation. (Goffman 1990:132)

Former child stars are often careful to show that they are sensible, adult, not spoilt, thoughtful, multi-layered, real, worthy, wise and, above all, authentic in order to try and deflect the stereotypical image of former child stars which dominates public thinking about this group. Three main techniques for achieving this authenticity were recurrent within the data and each can be seen as a way of re-establishing the individual's credibility as a 'normal' adult:

The first technique is the blaming of parents or a chance encounter for their entry into show business so as to undermine the strength of the transgression as it was not their choice. In this way the former child stars recast themselves as victims of circumstance rather than as the perpetrators of their own misfortune.

Former child stars frequently point out that the responsibility for their entry into show business falls squarely to their parents as if by ridding themselves of the blame of starting the fame machine they can also allay any personal stain on their character as someone who was/is greedy for fame with all the negative connotations of being shallow and arrogant that that implies. By so doing they render themselves a victim of circumstance rather than as having a deviant personality, and lessen the stigma of having a 'spoiled identity'. For

example, Paul Peterson emphasises the underlying power and size advantage that parents have over their powerless children:

I got started in show business because my mother was bigger than me. These little kids lie to you reporters and tell you they are the ones pursuing a career. (Peterson quoted in Ryan 2000:109)

and Jay North describes the anger he felt, and still feels, towards those whom he sees as responsible for 'ruining his life':

I still go into a batting cage and pretend that the baseballs are the heads of my aunt and uncle and the studio people who exploited me as 'Dennis the Menace'. And I always hit the ball well. (North quoted in Ryan 2000:82)

In her autobiography, Diana Serra Cary reflects in a more sympathetic manner on the thought processes that she imagines her parents went through before deciding to sign a seven year Hollywood contract on her behalf when she was two years old in 1920:

"All I want is to be able to pay our bills," I can hear Mother saying. And Father? "Well now, there's a sweet little spread out in Montana with tall grass, timber, and a river running through..." By temporarily pawning his pride, he could one day boast of a ranch that would constitute an imposing family estate, to be handed on to generations of Montgomerys. This mixture of inherited and cultivated values proved the irresistible bait entrapping Father in my child star career. It also formed the foundation of our working relationship for years to come. (Cary 1997:77)

Shirley Temple also describes her phenomenally successful career as the product of determined parents and emphasises her ambiguous attitude towards becoming involved in the film industry in describing the moment she was unwillingly 'discovered':

I remember when I was three and unknown and some character who turned out to be a talent scout came into dancing school and I hid under the piano. Obviously no poise. He stood around for a while watching and then he said, "I'll take the one under the piano." (Temple in Zierold 1965:61)

Interestingly even a seeming admission that someone wanted to be a child actor is still turned around so that the responsibility for the consequences of that decision are planted on the parents' shoulders, reinforcing the modern idea that children are not to be held responsible for any decision they make:

At the grand old age of four, Polley decided she wanted to be an actor like her father, Michael. Though her parents weren't particularly keen on the idea, Polley was so insistent, ('I wanted it, wanted it, wanted it') that they eventually gave in.

Even so, the blame still seems to lie with her parents for allowing her to follow her ambition, with the strong implication that they should have protected her from being a star:

A lot of kids want to be a fireman, too, but you don't send them to fire drill when they're seven years old. (Sarah Polley in *The Independent* 02.02.01)

Drew Barrymore paints a slightly different picture of why her parents were to blame for her entry into child stardom by explaining her desire to act as a way of feeling needed and wanted in a way she didn't feel at home with her dysfunctional family:

Why did I want to act? How did I know so early? The answer, I suppose, has always been pretty obvious – at least it has been to me. I loved being part of the group. Actually, I didn't just love it, I needed it. That's what drove me to club hopping later on. Being part of that really fun in-group. As a little kid I was the girl who didn't think anyone loved her, which only inspired me to try to be accepted even more. When you make a movie, or work on any kind of production, I learned, you become part of a very close group. It's a lot like being in a family, a big extended family. And I loved that. (Barrymore 1991:43)

Explaining their entry into child stardom as triggered by either emotional lack or as the result of selfish or misguided parenting, is a useful way for former child stars to begin to re-construct their social identity as a person who is fundamentally the same as everyone else, but who has had some unusual and frequently unhappy experiences. This leads on to the second common technique of attempting to establish authenticity that is evident in the data - the emphasis on normality. The ordinariness of their interests, personal

relationships, habits, beliefs and so on is often referred to by former child stars in order to realign their identity with their contemporaries so as to dispel notions of strangeness or stigma with which they are often associated.

This need to be recognised as normal and the bewildering experience of unwittingly becoming a mere image of oneself is poignantly described below in an extract from a letter by Deanna Durbin which was published in the Washington Post in the 1950s:

My fans sat in the dark, anonymous and obscure, while I was projected bigger than life on the screen. Fans took home an image of me and studio press agents filled in the personal details. They invented most of them and before I would resist, this worldwide picture of me came back stronger than my real person and very often conflicted with it. How could a young, unformed girl fight this publicized image of herself while still groping for her own personality? I was a typical thirteen-year-old American girl. The character I was forced into had little or nothing in common with myself – or with any other youth of my generation for that matter. (Durbin in Zierold 1965:203)

Culkin also explains how uncomfortable it is not to be perceived as normal and how frightening it is to be powerlessness over one's public image:

It's so hard for me to try to see me the way everyone else sees me. Because, you know, there are some times when I think people think I'm the freakiest person in the entire world. I mean, people have really odd preconceived notions of who I am – everyone either thinks I'm either strung out or just plum crazy or just really, you know, emotionally scarred or whatever. (The Face, November 2002)

and he goes on to defend his young (and ultimately very short-lived marriage) as a run-of-the-mill event:

People get married young all the time – just because I do, it becomes a big deal. (ibid)

The importance of reaffirming the shared consensus that children should have a 'proper, normal childhood' is a strong theme in the narratives, indicating the internalisation of the current Western dominant discourse which defines childhood as a separate, protected space

which is characterised by the image of the playful, carefree child rather than the working child who is economically active in public life. The stigma that is attached to those who have not had a 'normal' childhood is a large element of the overall stigma of having been a child star and it seems likely that it is for this reason that there is frequently an emphasis on having wanted to be a 'regular kid' rather than be a star as a child:

I don't think it's healthy. I think I'd have been better off at school. I would rather have been at school then, certainly. (Sarah Polley in *The Independent* 02.02.01)

I just needed a break. I wanted to go back to school. I was: 'This is my last opportunity to be a normal person.' I just wanted to be 14. I wanted to be 15. I wanted to do those things. (Culkin in *The Face*, November 2002)

I needed to do something that was somewhat normal – I hate that word, but you know what I mean. I needed that for myself more than anything, I really did. (Glenn Scarpelli in Ryan 2000:174)

I don't want to go back to making pictures and I wouldn't recommend it as a career for youngsters. It's hard enough to grow up without getting into the kind of life where your friends are adults instead of children. I missed out on a lot of the joys of girls who lead normal lives. (Deanna Durbin 1952 in Zierold 1965:202)

The modern psychological idea that a missed childhood has to be made up for in later life, by for example, regressing back into childhood or undergoing psychoanalysis to explore key events from one's youngest years, seems to be a commonly drawn upon discourse in attempts by former child stars to rationalise and explain their behaviour:

I get to be a kid now, because I wasn't a kid when I supposed to be one. But in some ways, I'm like an old woman: lived it, seen it, done it, have the T-shirt. (Barrymore in *The Times* 28.07.05)

From the time I was very young, I was a professional, making money and assuming responsibilities. I was living the life of a thirty year old. (Kristy McNichol in Ryan 2000:95)

The strength of the tenets of developmental psychology which explain growing up as a set sequence of ages and stages whereby deviation from the schema is detrimental to the fully grown adult's personality is evident in the way in which this theory is unquestionably accepted in contemporary narratives of former child stars. For example:

My first 20 years were spent working in an adult world. I made up for it by being a hell-raiser for the next 10 years. (Butch Patrick in Ryan 2000:96)

The logic of having to reclaim a childhood that was 'lost' in order to be a 'whole' person at last is a peculiarly late modern idea that informs both the concept of there being a curse on child stars and the way in which former child stars often rationalise and justify any subsequent ill fortune or criminal behaviour. As Goffman explains; 'The stigmatized individual is likely to use his stigma for 'secondary gains', as an excuse for ill success that has come his way for other reasons' and he goes on to describe a patient whose facial disfigurement dominates all aspects of his social and emotional adjustment:

It is the 'hook' on which the patient has hung all inadequacies, all dissatisfactions, all procrastinations and all unpleasant duties of social life, and he has come to depend on it not only as a reasonable escape from competition but as a protection from social responsibility. (Goffman 1990:21)

Being a former child star certainly does seem to be used as a hook for inadequacies and dissatisfactions for some, just as the media chooses to hook all negative events in a former child star's life onto the fact that they were successful when very young. This link between the damaged child self and the damaged adult self is further reinforced in many narratives by the process of confessing to how miserable they really were as children – the 'true story' of what life was like as a child star.

This brings us to the third technique often used by former child stars to try to establish authenticity as adults, namely the highlighting of their unhappy experiences as a child star and/or their difficult relationship with their parents. Such experiences are carefully presented as being none of the child's fault or under their control and can be seen as

narrative tools used in order to gain sympathy and understanding and defuse the negative associations of having had exceptional experiences as a child. This is achieved by former child stars by casting themselves as unenviable and encourages the public to look behind the media created stereotyped image and see the individual as a 'real person'.

Unhappy experiences are often related to the complicated relationship between child and parent which being a child star seems to engender due to fears that the parent is living out his or her dreams through the child or that the child's chief value to the parent is in financial terms:

When I was old enough to start caring about these things I did think I'd like to be able to go home and talk to my dad instead of my manager. To be able to separate the two is not easy...he had always wanted to be an actor, and I think he was living through me. (Petula Clark in *The Guardian*, 20.02.02)

It was something that I didn't really want to do in the first place really, and it was just something that became...it just felt like there was a machine and it was starting to eat me up too. And I kind of didn't want to be part of that whole world. It wasn't me. But it was something that I really didn't necessarily have a choice in the matter. There was too much money and too many livelihoods at stake for me to just quit, or for my father to allow me to quit. (Culkin in *The Face*, November 2002)

It definitely wasn't what a father-son relationship should be, from very early on...he was abusive and he hit and he got drunk and all those now cliché kind of things. (Culkin in *The Face*, November 2002)

The feeling of powerlessness in the face of not just parents but also agents, producers, directors and money-men is also drawn on to elicit pity in the narratives of the former child stars:

I remember one time near the end of school year, I was walking down the road with my mother saying what I wanted to do this summer and suddenly I knew there was something she did not want to tell me. She said: 'Don't make any plans this summer. You might be working.' Then you find out they had already signed the contract. (Culkin in *The Guardian*, 09.10.00)

The Rank Organisation to whom I was under contract didn't want me to grow up because I was more valuable to them as a child than as an adolescent. So I was kept back. (Clark in The Guardian, 20.02.02)

We had to set up our own companies. We had to get accountants and sit in on board meetings. I would ask questions but I was 15 and I felt like I was bothering them. (Michael Grant in The Guardian 21.03.03)

Even then, at 13, I was thinking, this isn't what I want. We weren't really in a position to argue. I should have been more assertive in hindsight, but I was a child. I had no influence on my career. To say we were manipulated is an understatement. We were led by everybody and anybody. (Michael Grant in The Guardian 21.03.03)

I was a quarter of a thing. Whatever I did, I felt the burden of three other people and all the crew who worked on the show. (David Nelson in Ryan 2000:42)

Being lonely and isolated is also a common theme in recounts of early childhood experiences for former child stars:

One day you are an average kid walking down the street and the next this kid is peering in your window trying to get a glimpse of you. That was too much for me to handle. I didn't have any friends. I was one of those kids who lock themselves in a room and drown themselves in television. (Culkin in The Guardian, 09.10.00)

They moved to a flat in Clapham, south London and while her mother revelled in the swinging sixties, Ripley says she used to put signs in the windows asking passing children to befriend her. She has not spoken to her mother for nine years. (The Guardian 10.08.99)

And simply not enjoying the work is emphasised by some who want to dispel the image that being a child star is somehow an easy ride or a quick ticket to success:

I really hated it...In those days you didn't even get paid enough to make it worth it. (Heather Ripley in The Guardian 10.08.99)

The world completely revolved around the show...it's like being in prison. Your life is completely dominated by this part you're playing. (Peterson in Ryan 2000:41)

It was tough. There were a lot of times when I did not want to be there. There's times, you know, when I may have been sick and possibly was working and breaking certain, you know, child labour laws. But there were times when you had to do that. And there were times when instead of my mother grabbing me, saying, "No, we're leaving right now," they'd say, "Look please, we just need this last shot – this last shot." (Jon Provost in Ryan 2000:42)

As explained above, the recounting of such sad stories can be read as further attempts to establish authenticity by the former child stars - demonstrations of their membership of the 'real world'. The importance of showing that one understands and accepts the social rules governing one's society, even if, for reasons beyond your control you are, or were, unable to conform to them, is explained by Goffman:

To fail to adhere to the code is to be a self-deluded, misguided person; to succeed is to be both real and worthy, two spiritual qualities that combine to produce what is called 'authenticity.' (1990:135)

Goffman describes the advocated codes of conduct for stigmatised individuals which are usually suggested by professionals in terms of how to treat others, strategies of disclosure and how best to conceptualise oneself and also outlines those which are often developed by the individuals themselves such as to see trials as a blessing in disguise or to develop a hostile bravado.

As demonstrated in the preceding analysis, in the case of former child stars there seems to be a standardised response to those stigmatised by a childhood of precocious fame and success which runs through many of the narratives studied. This can be summarised as a three pronged approach to establishing acceptance and gaining credibility and involves; abdicating responsibility, emphasising normality and reiterating the personal pain experienced. The overriding objective of narratives containing these elements seems to be to demonstrate that a price for success HAS been paid, thereby challenging the assumption

that an adult who was a child star not only attracts but also deserves bad luck, pity and ridicule as a punishment for his or her supposedly charmed childhood.

This sentiment that to have been a child star is a label that comes with so much baggage and expectation that those stigmatised by it spend a lifetime trying to distance themselves from its connotations is summed up by Paul Peterson:

They don't pay you enough for forever. (Peterson in Ryan 2000:3)

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described how the media has created an image of the child star as a cursed individual who is destined for failure in adult life and has examined the individual responses of adult child stars to being stigmatised in this way. In the first section, it was shown that certain journalistic techniques in writing about child stars, such as the sensationalist reporting of 'child star gone bad' stories and the attribution of any negative experiences in a former child star's adult life to their early celebrity, work to reinforce and naturalise the idea that childhood success in the entertainment business is detrimental to happiness in adult life. Having established how child stars are constructed as powerless to control their own public image and destiny in the press, I went on to explore the question of why their stories are presented in such a limited and largely derogatory manner. By drawing on anthropological theories of transgression and punishment it was demonstrated that the way child stars are written about in the media illuminates their status as transgressors in our culture due to their deviation from 'normal' children on the one hand, and their illicit trespassing into the adult territories of glamour, sexuality, celebrity and financial success on the other. As demonstrated through anthropological research (Douglas 1966, Van Gennep 1960), transgressive acts which cross the abstract boundaries of consensual community life are always conceptualised as dangerous challenges to the social order, and so those who commit such acts are punished and stigmatised for their wrongdoing. The treatment of the child star in the press was therefore explained in terms of this process and shown to be subject to some of the same techniques of anomaly control

identified by Douglas in her study of polluting persons in primitive societies, such as being identified as 'peculiar' and/or 'dangerous'.

The second section of the chapter went on to investigate the reactions of former child stars to this deviant construction of their identities. By analysing the narrative techniques used to justify and rationalise their experiences, as evident in interviews and autobiographical data, it was possible to explore how such individuals both internalise and react to social information about themselves and others and adjust their self-narratives according to dominant definitions of 'normality'. By using the theoretical framework established by Goffman, in his work on stigma and spoiled identities, it was demonstrated how former child stars attempt to establish credibility for their adult identities and authenticity in their public images through common techniques of justification, rationalisation and explanation. The difficulties enshrined in being forever associated with one's childhood self, especially when one was reified as a perfect and wonderful child, were identified as being a central part of the experience of this group who are, in a sense, public representations of the complex status of children in our society who are both images of the future and icons of nostalgia for a lost past.

From this analysis then, it has also become clear that the construction of the child star in the media is connected to wider issues about what constitutes a normal childhood and what happens to those individuals whose early experiences fall outside such a definition. As demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, the socially constructed idea of the 'curse' of the child star has become the dominant discourse surrounding this group due, in a large part, to the way in which stories about child stars are presented in the print media. By examining the way in which such stories draw on shared assumptions about children, childhood and 'normality' it is possible to identify themes which have relevance beyond the immediate scope of this study. Firstly, by defining the experience of child stardom as negative and dangerous, the 'curse' enables us to see clearly where the boundaries of acceptable child behaviour and experience lie, at least in one particular direction, and so draws attention to the way in which childhood is socially constructed in our culture. This brings up issues of the 'commonality of childhood experience' which, it has been argued, our society attempts to force on all children, who are viewed as a homogenous group

despite huge differences in physicality, ability, experience and opportunity, thus rendering any whose experiences fall outside the 'normal' as stigmatised. In this sense then child stars are just one example of the many 'failures of childhood' who defy definition according to the Western ideal of the concept and share their 'abnormal' status with others who are excluded due to disability, ethnicity, social status or antisocial behaviour.

Furthermore, the perpetuation of the negative connotation of child stars illuminates the power of the media to oppress certain minority groups by reducing their experiences to a formulised convention and highlights the ways in which such shared stereotypes work to objectify the individual whose experiences place him or her in a specified category, and thus reaffirms the power of the dominant group. In this sense it is relevant to locate the powerlessness of the child star in the broader context of uneven power relations between adults and children, between 'normal' and 'abnormal' children and between the established authority and minority groups within society. The child star falls on the weak side of each of these dichotomies and is thus exceptionally vulnerable to being constructed, constrained and defined by forces greater than itself. From this perspective, the child star is nothing more than a media creation and as such can be toyed with, exploited, discredited and then discarded according to the fickle dictates of the audience.

However, this pathetic image of the child star is but part of the story and the next chapter will examine the phenomenon of successful youngsters from a different perspective. By exploring the enormous power which child stars have to generate emotion, adulation and multi-million pound movie deals the image of the child star as a poor exploited innocent will be shown to be just one version of describing the child star which particularly suits our current social climate in regards to dominant definitions of children and childhood. It will be demonstrated that there is another equally valid, concurrent way of understanding the child star, this time in terms of their inherent power rather than their socially constructed powerlessness, without which the enduring cultural significance of the child star cannot be fully appreciated.

The aim of this chapter has been to demonstrate the powerlessness of the child star and the former child star in escaping from stereotypical definitions of themselves, definitions which

are created and controlled externally by the cultural context in which they live. In relation to answering the fundamental questions posed in the introduction of this study as to ‘why we have child stars’ and ‘why they are vilified in the press’ this chapter has aimed to address the latter rather than the former question and has shown that by being presented as deviant in the media, the fate of the child star serves to reinforce dominant collective values as to the rightful place of children in our society. The question of why we have child stars at all is explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Data Analysis II - The Power of Child Stars

Although the analysis of discourses which inform the presentation and representation of child stars in the preceding chapter is immensely useful in deconstructing the form and content of media texts on or about such individuals, a whole dimension of meaning is also omitted in such an approach to data analysis. From the very first readings of newspaper and magazine articles about child stars it was apparent that there was something timeless and mythical about both the structure of the stories and the main characters within them. Whereas discourse analysis focuses on the specific activities of rationalisation, justification and categorisation evident in texts which are contingent upon the particular social context from which they emanate, it cannot account for the possibility of universal themes and ideologies which may tell us more about what it means to be human rather than what meanings have been assigned by humans in a specific society at a particular time.

Therefore, the proceeding analysis will be examining the data from a broadly structuralist perspective. As described in the Methodology, structuralism emanates from the fields of linguistics and anthropology and has as the ultimate object of its enquiry 'the permanent structures into which individual human acts, perceptions and stances fit and from which they derive their final nature' (Eagleton 1996:18). This 'final nature' has been interpreted by many structuralists as 'an explicit search for the permanent structures of the mind itself' (Jameson quoted in Eagleton 1996:18). This attempt to connect inherent structures of the mind with consistencies in the organisation and culture of all human societies has been largely rejected by postmodern thinkers who consider such a stance to be reductionist, preferring instead to conceptualise human societies as fragmented, multi-faceted and diverse with meaning constructed by each sub-group depending on its own values, beliefs and history. As Lyotard (1984) argues in *The Postmodern Condition*, the times of the 'violence of the grand narratives' such as dialectical materialism are over, it is now time for the little stories to be heard.

Whilst accepting the futility of attempting to reduce the diversity of human experience to a definable set of underlying cognitive structures, it would also seem that in order to fully understand certain fundamental aspects of human society it is both useful and necessary to approach certain phenomena from a structuralist perspective. It is hoped that the following analysis will demonstrate that the child star is one of these phenomena, and that by tracing the power that is inherent in the images and actions of this tiny band of children a fuller understanding of the complexities, tensions and paradoxes surrounding our current construction of the child will become possible.

The first section will consider the conceptual function that the child star fulfils by exploring the ideas of psychoanalytic theory, especially the work of Carl Jung, in relation to the recurring archetype of the 'wonder-child'.

The second section, 'The Power of Taboo', will examine the role of linguistics and cognitive categorisation in understanding power. In particular it will consider child stars in light of Edmund Leach's work on the power of those beings who inhabit a 'between categories' status.

The final section is called 'The Power of Stories' and will consider the mythical structure of the life stories of child stars as they appear in the media. Focussing on a case study of stories relating to Charlotte Church it will examine how the child as a timeless symbol of the fight between good and evil takes the form of a victim of the materialistic, self-serving, commercialised nature of capitalist consumer culture in contemporary stories about child stars.

Taken together it is hoped that these three strands of analysis will provide an answer to the question of why we have child stars in our culture.

6.1 'Bigger than Big and Smaller than Small' : The Child Archetype and The Child Star

This section will consider the modern child star as a contemporary manifestation of the 'Child' motif, one of the primordial archetypes described by Jung (1959), in an attempt to connect our current understanding of the child star with something more than a socially constructed concept.

Beginning with a review of the ubiquity of extraordinary children as characters in the myths and legends of the world, I then identify the contemporary Western child star as a modern day manifestation of this ancient archetype. I go on to explain Jung's theory of archetypes and the unconscious in detail with specific reference to the significance of the 'Child' motif and describe how the Christ-child can be conceptualised as the ultimate example of the most powerful 'child' motif – the 'child-god'. Using extracts of textual and visual data about child stars from the early to mid twentieth century, I show how their portrayals are drawn from characteristics traditionally associated with the Christ-child, such as having supernatural qualities and being inspirational to others. The endurance of the significance of such Christ like imagery even in today's fragmented post-modern culture is also demonstrated through an analysis of images of the former child star Macaulay Culkin.

Having established the connection between the twentieth century construction of the child star and the primordial archetype of the Christ-child, I go on to outline how two other, related powerful themes which have always characterised archetypal wonder-children in myths and legends can still be seen to inform representations of contemporary child stars and indeed form the basis of their significance in our culture. These two themes are: the emphasis on the smallness of the child in contrast to the bigness of their gift or talent and the central importance of the naturalness of the child which represents both closeness to the divine and freedom from the corruptions of the adult world.

I end this section by reflecting on the enduring relevance of the 'child' motif to

contemporary society and reaffirm my argument that the child star can be conceptualised as a modern manifestation of the ancient archetype of the wonder-child.

6.1.1 *The History of the Wonder-Child*

Whilst accepting on one level that the child is ‘eternally a cultural invention’ (Kessen 1979), it also seems possible that the power of children to generate strong emotional reactions and feelings such as nostalgia, hope and pity is located within the human psyche and reflected by a culture rather than the other way around. Furthermore, in this context child stars can be seen as ultimate embodiments of this power due to the way in which they represent ideals of childhood in the societies which create them. Taken from this perspective, the child star of stage and screen begins to look less like a symptom of the exploitation of innocence by a media-saturated, late capitalist society and more like a recent contribution to an ancient tradition of extraordinary children in myth and folklore from around the world. As Radford has noted in his study of exceptional early achievers:

Young heroes are universal in legend, from Alexander through George Washington to Robin, Batman’s Boy Wonder. (Radford 1990:28)

Radford claims that the idea that children might have some form of supernatural power or ability has persisted for centuries and still continues (Inglis 1986, Peterson 1987). From the earliest recorded myths and legends the superchild has appeared, possessing extraordinary strength, precocious skills and abilities and/or a phenomenal speed of growth. For example, Hercules is said to have strangled two snakes in his cradle, Merlin spoke as soon as he was born and the supernatural growth of the hero is a ‘plot device almost ubiquitous throughout Oceania.’ (Lessa 1966:101).

Interestingly, elements of the supernatural, mythical marvellous child are evident in stories of child stars since Victorian times. For example, in this extract from an interview with an adult vaudeville performer who had been working all his life in the theatre, emphasis and

pride is placed on the fact that he started performing almost from birth and was in no need of the protective period of childhood:

‘Let us go back to the days of your childhood.’

‘Oh, yes. I was never one of them. Somehow or other I got on to the stage at a very early age, and felt quite a man. They tell me I fell from my cradle not a 1,000 miles from my birth. This catastrophe fixed me as an acrobat, and so I went on till I reached the age of eight.’ (Interview with Dan Leno in *The Music Hall and Theatre* 05.10.1889)

Similarly, a later interview with the father of Mickey Rooney, in which Mr Rooney reflects on the medical wonder of his son’s super fast development, highlights the endurance of this depiction of the child star as being inexplicably extraordinary:

‘Mickey didn’t have much of a childhood,’ his dad often reminisced. ‘At the age of one and a half we had a doctor give him a thorough check-up, and he told us Mickey had the mentality of a ten year old. And by the time he was three, Mickey was earning a living on the stage.’

(Mr Rooney Snr in Zierold 1965:228)

In mythical tales such developmental precocity serves to separate heroes from simple mortals and to mark out the individual as chosen, special and ‘touched by the divine’, destined to live through extraordinary events, to teach others lessons about life and ultimately to sacrifice their own personal happiness to the greater good of those they serve. That this method of separating out the ‘hero’ from the ‘mortal’ has been a common thread in constructing child stars as special and marvellous since Victorian times, as demonstrated in the above examples, is testament to the strength of this ‘plot device’ to mark certain children out as having a significant destiny.

Indeed, Kerenyi, who worked closely with Jung in trying to devise a ‘Science of Mythology’, identified the great significance of the ‘child’ motif in Greek and Roman mythology and drew parallels with sources from India and Finland. However, although he warned against attempting to collate a comprehensive study of such incidences, claiming

that it would 'contribute nothing decisive in principle,' he did assert that 'it would nevertheless produce a world-wide incidence and frequency of the motif.' (Jung 1959:15).

Taking Kerényi's advice then, it is not the aim of this section to present evidence of the multitude manifestations of the extraordinary child as it appears in the myths and stories of many countries - it is taken for granted that they are there - but to concentrate on the definition and expression of one contemporary example of the extraordinary child - the 'child star' - in British and American society since the turn of the twentieth century.

If definitions of success are culturally specific then what else would be expected from a modern day heroic child than to be famous and to look perfect in close up? Late capitalist society does not call for children with the ability to strangle snakes or defeat armies or indeed to defeat the supernatural forces of evil. Our definitions of a wonder child are all about image, sentiment and the reinforcement of stereotypical ideas about perfect children. That is where we find our hope for the future and our experience of 'wholeness' - through the image of the perfect child projected on screen or stage, or through a CD player, an image I would argue, that is no more related to 'normal' children than Hercules or Jesus were similar to their contemporaries. However, the very nature of the mass media, and especially the film industry and star system in America, encourages the illusion that anyone can be famous, they just need a 'lucky break'. As Marshall has explored in *Power and Celebrity* (1997) the ubiquitous rags to riches story of the successful film star encourages the audience to align themselves with a star on one level because he/she is just like them, but also to feed their fantastical aspirations that one day it really could be them. The fascination with the day to day lives and habits of celebrities is evidence of just how successful this marketing technique has been. In this sense then the child on screen could be anyone's child, and yet there is undeniably something exceptional about them as they generally embody, or are presented as embodying, the facets of childhood which represent the ideal in that society at that particular time. The differences between the child stars of today and the child heroes of ancient myths, and all those children who have been marked out as exceptional in some way in-between times, are, I would argue, merely surface ones.

What is important to this discussion are the underlying or structural elements of the child star which are universal, timeless and overwhelmingly powerful. In order to explore this idea further, the following section considers Jung's theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious with particular focus on the 'child' motif and its relation to the modern child star.

6.1.2 Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious

Jung argues that the extensive parallels among the mythologies of societies "force" us to assume that we are dealing with 'autochthonous' revivals independent of all tradition and thus that 'myth-forming' structural elements must be present in the unconscious psyche' (1959:152) and that these products take the form of 'motifs', 'primordial images' or 'archetypes'. The 'child' motif is one example of these archetypes and is said to represent the 'preconscious, childhood aspect of the collective psyche' (Jung 1959:161). Other archetypes include the 'trickster', the 'spirit', and the 'mother', all of which appear frequently in dreams, myths and fairytales in various guises - for example, 'child' can appear as a dwarf, an animal or even as a golden egg. Clearly then, the motif is not intended to be understood as a real person - the 'child' is a symbol, not an empirical child. As Jung explains; 'The archetype does not proceed from physical facts, but describes how the psyche experiences physical fact' (Jung 1959:154) although, as Jung concedes, in the last analysis it is impossible to say what the archetypes do actually refer to as they are manifestations of processes in the unconscious.

Jung uses the term 'collective unconscious' to refer to certain common structural elements of the human psyche which 'like the morphological elements of the human body, are *inherited*' (Jung 1959:155) and which influence and direct our feelings, thought and actions in ways in which we are not consciously aware. Jung conceptualises the collective unconscious as being located in the deep recesses of our minds where individual and cultural differences are no longer relevant:

The deeper 'layers' of the psyche lose their individual uniqueness as they retreat farther and farther into darkness. 'Lower down'...they become increasingly collective until they are universalised and extinguished in the body's materiality. (Jung 1959:173)

Jung uses the concept of the collective unconscious to explain the universality of themes and motifs in myths¹ and views the recurrence of archetypes as evidence of the eternal struggle for synthesis of the conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche and of the inherent human fear of loss of connection with their primordial, unconscious beginnings. The archetypes then are a vital link with the essential, original nature of human beings:

If we cannot deny the archetypes or otherwise neutralize them, we are confronted, at every new stage in the differentiation of consciousness to which civilization attains, with the task of finding a new interpretation appropriate to this stage, in order to connect the life of the past that still exists in us with the life of the present, which threatens to slip away from us. (Jung 1959:157)

The 'child' archetype has a central part to play in assuaging this fear of loss of connection with the past as, 'over and over again in the 'metamorphosis of the gods', he rises up as the prophet or first born of a new generation and appears unexpectedly in the unlikeliest of places' (Jung 1959:158). Jung gives the Christ-child as the ultimate example of this 'child-god' motif who is described in the legend of St Christopher as being 'smaller than small and bigger than big', thus encapsulating the connection of supernatural, divine power with mere mortals which the 'child' archetype represents. The association of religiosity with the 'child' motif was common throughout the Middle Ages from which time Jung notes there is much evidence of visions or 'irruptions of consciousness' which involved children, such as Meister Eckhart's famous vision of a naked boy. Jung also connects the motif with spontaneous experiences in English ghost stories such as the 'Radiant Boy' recorded by Ingram in 1890. The mystical character of the 'child' motif also appears in

¹ Although others have found alternative explanations for such similarities e.g. Warner 1995 who argues for a theory of dissemination of stories passed on by written and oral traditions.

literature with, for example, Goethe's Faust being transformed into a boy and admitted into the 'choir of blessed youths' after his death.

In relation to our modern day child stars, it seems likely that in the secular, media saturated society we inhabit the 'new interpretation' of the 'child' has less to do with religion and more to do with celebrity. Indeed as Jung asserts, archetypes cannot be disposed of as non-scientific, archaic relics of an earlier less rational time and nor can they be explained away, we are able only to; 'dream the myth onwards and give it a modern dress.' (Jung 1959:160). That the 'modern dress' of the 'child' archetype is that of a media celebrity is somewhat inevitable given the social context in which the motif is now being expressed. However, analysis of descriptions of child stars also reflect the earlier mystical connections of the 'child' and the theme of religiosity is a recurrent, occasionally dominant one throughout twentieth century writings on child stars. This suggests two main issues: firstly, that the need for the child star to represent a connection between the natural and the supernatural, or the mortal and the divine is still very much alive and informs our construction of the child star, and secondly, that the way in which Jesus and the Christian concepts of angels and cherubs are referenced in such descriptions indicate that the Christ-child has become a prototype of child stars since the dissemination of His story, thus providing a tangible link between modern day child stars of the stage and screen and the primordial 'child-god'. These themes will be explored in the following section which examines newspaper and magazine articles about child stars since the early twentieth century

6.1.3 The Christ-like Child Star

Taking Christ as the ultimate archetype of the wonder-child or child star it is interesting to note the similarities between His image and the way in which child stars of the golden era of Hollywood were portrayed. The following eight attributes came up repeatedly in literature on child stars of that time as the exemplary quotes demonstrate, each reflecting a quality which has traditionally been associated with the divine goodness of the Christ-child who is portrayed as perfect, pure and the living embodiment of God on earth. According to

the dominant themes in the data then, the child star:

1. Has a natural, inherent talent that has not been taught.

Miss Corbin is a remarkable little emotional actress and her ability to shed tears is considered marvellous for she does not 'act', but is just as natural and unaffected as her parents could wish for and does not realize the value of her work. (Review of 'Babes in the Woods' in Virginia Lee Corbin biography 1917²)

She can talk, dance, sing, play the piano and violin, cry, play doll and play dead with equal ease and grace. She doesn't have to be pinched when the director calls for a stream of tears to roll down her chubby little cheeks, for she is emotionally, dramatically emotional, and feels her roles as deeply as do the grown-up stars. (Moving Picture Stories 28.07.1916)

2 Embodies physical perfection.

Her pretty little doll face is so perfect that you hope she'll never, never grow older. A slender little figure, with a stateliness derived, perhaps, from her English-French ancestry, which is fascinating, supports her flower-like face. (Review in Virginia Lee Corbin biography 1917)

As a glance at her photograph will reveal, if you have for the moment forgotten how she looked on the screen, this little girl who earns a great big salary every week is remarkably beautiful. (Moving Picture Stories 28.07.1916)

3 Has a special, almost supernatural quality.

Her tiny face is ethereal in its glowing sensitiveness. (Description of Margaret O'Brien in Photoplay Magazine 1943)

These two children...have ability that is absolutely staggering to the average person. Jane has been pronounced a most marvellous child actress. She is fearless, she has an elfin comprehension of 'stunts' that is amazing and a true dramatic sense. (Moving Picture Stories 28.07.1916)

² Virginia Lee Corbin Biography on www.silentsaregolden.com

4 Is set apart from ‘normal’ children by way of their lifestyle and relationships with adults.

During this time, Virginia, as well as the other children, were being treated ‘royally’ by the Fox company. On the studio lot they were provided a private bed, individual dressing rooms, play rooms, a gymnasium, baths, a swimming pool and a rest room. (Virginia Lee Corbin biography 1917)

5 Does not engage in annoying or irritating behaviour which would otherwise be typical of a child of their age.

Once when she was stubborn, her mother slapped her hands. She’s never forgotten it and the one word ‘punishment’ is enough to settle any problem. (Description of Margaret O’Brien in Photoplay Magazine 1943)

6 Has a purpose in life to uplift or inspire others.

Ah Jackie, wonderful Jackie! Jackie is inspiring and inspired. Just to be in his presence is to feel inspired. His personality is beautiful, lovely. It’s spiritual. You feel close to his spirituality. (Charlie Chaplin on Jackie Coogan 1921 in Cary 1997:60)

7 Is often unusually intelligent and/or demonstrates developmental precocity.

(she) gave evidence of extraordinariness by talking at age 11 months. She also displayed unusual emotional ability at an early age – that is, she cried. When she was three, Virginia could sing in key, anything she had heard more than once. She had a wonderful memory, even at that early age, and was a remarkable dancer. (Quote from 1917 in Virginia Lee Corbin biography)

though she was only a frail little being, her mind was developed far more than one would expect, and when she learnt to talk, she never spoke a baby word. She seemed to have a wonderful memory also, and easily learnt all kinds of songs, stories and poems by heart. (quote from 1915 in Virginia Lee Corbin biography)

8 Is always unusually sensitive.

Expressions flee across her tiny face like living things as she listens to her director or a friend. Their every thought finds true response on the plainest of little faces. (Description of Margaret O'Brien in *Photoplay Magazine* 1943)

The quasi religious status of the child star is exemplified in this extraordinary quote in an article in *Photoplay* magazine in 1923 entitled 'What's going to happen to Jackie Coogan?' where the tacit relationship between the child star and Jesus is made explicit:

After meeting him several times with his serious little manner, his courtesies and profound remarks, you wonder, 'Am I hypnotized? Is he genius or child?' We talked, he danced for me and recited with a reverence close to holy, the words of 'My Madonna.' I thought of the Young King who stood in rags at the steps of the altar...and lo! Through the painted windows came the sunlight streaming upon him, and the sunbeams wove round him a tissued robe...he stood there in king's raiment, and the glory of God filled the place, and the trumpeters blew upon their trumpets and the singing boys sang, and the Bishop's face grew pale and his hands trembled. 'A greater than I hath crowned thee' he cried and knelt before him...I thought of Jackie as the Young King. And I went away wondering. For me Jackie is a masterpiece of life. Can the world change or time alter such a masterpiece? (Herbert Howe in *Photoplay Magazine* Dec 1923)

Endowing a select few children with such extreme Christ like qualities in order to market films demonstrates the power which children possess to generate emotion and a deep sense of awe in adults (as well as the power which adults have to manipulate the image of the child). Such explicit endowments of child stars with saintly qualities is characteristic of the textual construction of the child star in Hollywood in the early decades of the twentieth century and was reinforced through studio portraits and magazine photographs of the young stars looking beautiful, innocent and vulnerable as in this portrait of Shirley Temple (Fig 1.1) from the mid 1930s. With her halo of blond curly hair, cherubic features, slightly cuddly build and glowing fair skin Temple looks every inch the angel child in this picture -

an image further reinforced by her hands being clasped as if in prayer and the white dress she is wearing. Her smile looks natural and she appears to be delighted about something she is looking at to the left of the camera lens. In effect the picture works because it portrays a moment of innocent glee in which a beautiful child's delight in the world has been captured to uplift and inspire world weary adults.

Such blatant textual and visual links between the child star and the Christ child are less evident in today's more cynical, secular social climate than in pre-war Western society. However, as the following pictures of Macaulay Culkin demonstrate, the cultural references to angelic purity are still there to be drawn upon, albeit in the style of postmodern pastiche rather than as straight-faced representation. In these images which formed part of an interview feature with Culkin in *The Face* magazine in 2002 when he was 22, the former child star is depicted in ways which both reference his status as an iconic child star with all the incumbent expectations of innocence, beauty and 'supernaturalness' which go with it and also satirise that image by posing the subject with accoutrements of adult sexuality and vice.

It is interesting that the first image (Fig 1.2) where Culkin is wearing angel wings and smoking a cigarette only makes sense if we share the knowledge that this is a grown up child star who is battling with the stigma of his former identity. That his body in this image is accessorised in the front by the classic symbol of maturity and teenage rebellion - smoking a cigarette - and at the back by white angel wings reinforces the idea that his innocent past is behind him and he wants to move on into adulthood and be seen that way by others.

Fig 1.3 shows Culkin displaying a physical sign of his maturity – his underarm hair - and adopting a sexually inviting expression and pose in order, presumably, to reposition himself as an adult male. The homoerotic element to these photographs suggests another level of defiance to the innocent child star image that we assume Culkin is trying to leave behind. Whether or not he is actually gay is irrelevant to how the pictures work, moving

him further into the adult world of sexuality and away from the pre-sexual era of childhood. The sexual nature of the poses can also be read in reference to the taboo issues of paedophilia which surround child stars, whereby the visual pleasures they provide are often titillating to those who derive sexual gratification from fantasising about young children. Indeed, the fact that Culkin is shown poking his tongue out in Fig 1.4 can be read as both a defiance to this sexualisation of his innocent childhood image, and a satirisation of the fact that although he is a grown man he still looks uncannily like his ten year old self. By showing Culkin engaging in such a childish act as sticking out his tongue the picture seems to be blurring the divide between his child and adult self and demonstrating that the childlike image will always be part of who Culkin is and how others see him.

The final picture in this series (Fig 1.5) shows a happy Culkin replete with cigarette and beer grinning widely and looking extremely pleased with himself. Again, knowing his background as a child star engenders a specific reading of this picture whereby the adult symbols of the beer bottle and cigarette are in contrast both to the childish crouching position and the huge platform shoes he is wearing which bring to mind a child dressing up in adult clothes. However, the homoerotic feel of the picture again contorts that childlike image and reframes Culkin as something of a child/adult hybrid freak. However, the playful nature of the photos and the amused look on Culkin's face throughout the images suggests a deliberate manipulation and desecration of his former image and a claim to not be taken 'seriously' as an adult, but just to be accepted as who he is.

That these photos of Culkin engender such a reading are testament to the power of the image of the child star to bring with it associations of purity, innocence and specialness. Even though the link between the Christ-child and the child star is not so baldly made today as it was in the Hollywood child star era, certain recurrent themes still seem to characterise the 'starlike' qualities of certain children which reinforce their supernatural status and thus their connection to the archetype of the 'wonder-child'.

From the readings of the data, these themes seem to be largely concerned with the specialness of the child both in terms of their physical appearance and their 'nature' and can be divided into two main elements, each of which will be explored below. These are; the emphasis on the smallness and /or immaturity of the child in contrast to the size of his/her talent or success, and the highlighting of the importance of the child being 'natural'.

6.1.4 The Sacred Smallness of the Child

As described above, the concept of the child as 'smaller than small yet bigger than big' is one which has recurred in stories about heroic children throughout the centuries and across cultures. As Jung explains, the motif;

complements the impotence of the child by means of its equally miraculous deeds. This paradox is the essence of the hero. (Jung 1959:167)

Indeed, the 'tinyness' of child stars has long been central to their appeal, with some even making a whole career based on their unusually small stature. A well known example of this is Gary Coleman, the actor who played Arnold in the American 1980s TV sitcom *Diff'rent Strokes*. Coleman has a medical condition which prevented him growing taller than the height of a small child for the rest of his life and as a child star his longevity was almost entirely due to the fact that he could go on playing an eight year old when he was far into his teens. He defied that annoying trait of growing up which spelled the end of so many childhood careers, albeit to the reported detriment of his own psychological well-being (Ryan 2000). However, the very small-ness which made him so cute as a child became a physical stigma as he matured, an anomaly which media photographers exploited to the full with pictures emphasising the contradictory childlike stature and adult features of the former child star. This contrast is evident in Figs 1.6 and 1.7 which show Coleman at the height of his fame when he was ten years old, his tiny self looking endearingly sweet in a grown-up tuxedo and then twenty years later, again in a tuxedo, this time looking strangely out of place as he escorts a normal sized adult woman to a premiere. The very

characteristic which was so adorable when he was a child – his smallness – has completely changed in meaning as he has grown up and has now become a constant reminder of what he was and what he no longer is.

That the power of the child star resides in their ‘smallness’ coupled with their immaturity and tender years is clear in the following quote which sings the praises of yet more ‘marvellous’ small children:

Jane and Katherine Lee...are shining examples of just what genius a child may possess and still remain – just a child! (Moving Picture Stories 28.07.1916)

Pictures too work to reinforce this impressive combination of diminutive size and impressive ability, as demonstrated in this photo of Baby Peggy taken at the Century studios in the early 1920s (Fig 1.8) which encapsulates the essence of the child star who is both ‘bigger than big and smaller than small’. Whether the picture is staged or simply snapped is not known, although it seems likely that she was placed in the pose as it highlights so aptly her tiny size. Sitting in the corner of a huge, formal carved wooden chair, no doubt a studio prop, but one which would be used for actors playing statesmen or royalty, Baby Peggy is dwarfed by the size of this adult symbol of male power. The formality of the piece of furniture alone contrasts strikingly with the informal pose and overall demeanour of the child who sits with her little legs tucked in front of her and her body almost obscured by the magazine she is ‘reading’. That the magazine is, presumably, of a normal size further reinforces the smallness of Baby Peggy, and then there is the surprise of her ‘bigness’ – the magazine she is reading is called *Motion Picture News*. Here is a tiny girl who is actually a star in the biggest business in America. Here is a child who earns more money per week than most of her audience earn in a year and whose image is immortalised in celluloid forever. This child has met Franklin Roosevelt and receives birthday presents from some of the most powerful studio producers and actors in Hollywood. The message hits home – she is not simply ‘reading’ the *Motion Picture News* magazine – she is probably in it. We realise that we are looking at a picture of a pre-literate

child, who is most likely supposed to be looking at an image of herself in a publication celebrating the movie making business of which she is both a product and a producer. Such a lot of information held in the image of such a small child. Her serious face as she studies the magazine almost serves to reflect the adulthood of her position in society and yet her tiny body reveals her as a very young child. The image works to tell us that this child is special and that her specialness both separates her from 'normal' society and imbues her with a privileged status within that society.

In contemporary newspaper articles about child stars, this motif of sacred smallness tends to be in the form of a juxtaposition of the 'normal' child with his or her extraordinary talents or experiences. For example;

Declan Galbraith likes The Simpsons...His favourite foods are lasagne, pizza and spaghetti Bolognese and he wants some new computer games for Christmas. But Declan possesses an extraordinary singing voice and it has won him a million pound recording contract with EMI. (The Guardian 23.09.02)

They (the Harry Potter actors) are the most famous kids in the world, but they're also the most normal. (The Telegraph 25.10.02)

He has a voice coach and a manager. He even has his own fan club. Quite an entourage for a boy who still has a cuddly Barney dinosaur on his bed. (The Guardian 23.09.02)

The vulnerability of the children who possess such 'gifts' seems to be part of their appeal. Indeed, the very passage of childhood to adulthood can be seen as a universal journey from helplessness to strength, with the child star perhaps lighting the way with hope for the future. Jung describes the power of the 'child' like this:

The 'child' is all that is abandoned and exposed and at the same time divinely powerful; the insignificant dubious beginning and the triumphal end. The 'eternal child' in man is an indescribable experience, an incongruity, a handicap, and a divine prerogative. (Jung 1959:179)

As well as being ‘bigger than big and smaller than small’, the other most consistent theme in the construction of child stars to have survived over the decades is an emphasis on the importance of naturalness in the performance of a child. This together with related concepts of innocence, purity and vulnerability seem to represent the central characteristics of what is required from a child star in accordance with the ‘wonder-child’ archetype and is explored in the next sub-section.

6.1.5 The Cult of Naturalness

As bringers of light, that is, enlargers of consciousness, they overcome darkness, which is to say that they overcome the earlier unconscious state. (Jung 1959:169)

In essence the power of the child star appears to emanate largely from the authenticity of his/her performance in terms of being natural and unaffected. Such a performance embodies the pre-cultural, pure, immediate relationship which (very young) children have with the world and which could be seen as the very foundation of their power. Indeed the supposed preternatural wisdom of children (as celebrated to such a great extent by the eighteenth century Romantic movement), has come to form one of the central tenets of Western Society’s contemporary construction of childhood.

This power of child stars to connect world weary adults with something purer and more natural seems to be reinforced and celebrated in media stories, reviews and interviews in three main ways as outlined below:

1. The derision of artificiality and precociousness evident in the on or off screen behaviour of child stars.

This is related to the overwhelmingly negative attitude in the media towards children who have attended stage school, apparently expressing a shared sentiment that if ‘it’ doesn’t

come naturally, you can't be taught 'it', with the underlying assumption, of course, that 'it' is a divine gift. For example:

We really wanted to stay away from stage schools...There are so many mannerisms they have been taught which you just have to spend time helping them unlearn. (Director of the film *Billy Elliot* in *Observer* 27.08.00)

Jamie Bell...is another raw and untried talent. Although Bell had danced before, he had none of the trademark tricks that stage school tend to pass on. (*Observer* 27.08.00)

A touch of magic beats stage school. Child star of Harry Potter film proves that natural charm can outshine years of showbiz training. (*Observer* 27.08.00)

Even in the highly stylised environment of 1940s Hollywood, it seems that no-one wanted to see a phoney child:

..everybody was bowing to the talent of the popular boy star. Both were on the bill. The kid star came out first, in his best precious child manner, prancing and smirking. He was delicious – but he was a flop. Then Mickey (Rooney), about as big as a cigarette butt and every bit as unpretentious, shot out of the wings. He didn't fool around; he was as direct as a kick in the pants...he launched into his patter; he sang, he danced, he jawed with the audience – he wowed 'em. He made the kid star look like a cream puff somebody had stepped on. (*Photoplay Magazine* August 1943)

2. The approval of naturalness in the performances of children.

By responding to 'natural' performances and performers with admiration, the preferred style of child stars is made implicit in newspaper and magazine articles, as evident in the following quotes:

Potter director hails 'unstarry' actors. (*BBC News Online* 06.12.02)

Fishman...earned his role with his raw boyishness. He marched into an audition with no acting experience and few expectations. (LA Times 31.06.1996)

Lisa has tremendous enthusiasm. She's a natural. (LA Times 23.06.02)

It all started at his nan's 60th birthday party. All the children in the family were planning to sing her a song, but when it came to it, everybody chickened out – except Declan. He stood up and sang a folk song called Tell me Ma, and instantly everybody knew he had something special. (The Guardian 23.09.2002)

3. The emphasis on the innocence and vulnerability of the child star

In order to ensure child stars are seen as a non-threatening entity, their vulnerability is often alluded to. For example;

Little Girl Lost. (Title of article following suicide of former child star Dana Plato, The Guardian 13.05.1999)

But he's still a sweet boy, still delighted to come second in the local swimming gala...and bowled over by the cool little extras his burgeoning singing career have brought him. (The Guardian 23.09.02)

Interestingly, interviews, articles and reviews from the Victorian era tend not to attribute child actors and singers with special qualities or view them as being in some way more perfect or pure than other children, although they do praise naturalness in a child's performance:

her first appearance was not marked by those painful mechanical movements which so often distinguish the appearance of juvenile performers. (Review of Flora Robina in Interlude 16.01.1886)

We must accord our tribute of praise to Miss Vera Beringer for the most natural child performance we have ever seen...Her perception of the humour and pathos of the character is thoroughly well shown. (Review of Little Lord Fauntleroy in The Playgoer May 1889)

The reluctance of the Victorians to imbue divine qualities on to child performers is probably due to the immoral associations that surrounded the theatrical life and actors at the time, which would have made such angelic connotations quite unsuitable for those children who worked on the stage. It seems that the wonder-child of the Victorian era was more likely to be a refined, delicate musical prodigy or the fictional character of a redemptive child in a Dickensian novel.

Indeed, it took the bright lights and avarice of 1920s Hollywood to redefine the child actor as a child star by building on the established appeal of the natural child performer and adding elements of angelic purity and morality to create an image of a 'star child' who was fit for the movies. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the phenomenal success of this image can only be satisfactorily explained by reference to the strength of the 'wonder-child' archetype it was derived from.

6.1.6 The Relevance of the 'Child' Motif in Contemporary Western Society

As Jung reiterates, 'The child motif represents not only something that existed in the distant past but also something that exists *now*, whose purpose is to compensate or correct the 'inevitable one-sidedness and extravagances of the conscious mind' which has become too rational and progressive and thus is 'far from the laws and roots of his (sic) being.' (Jung 1959:162)

The great power of the 'child' motif and thus the child star is then its futurity, its potential to synthesise the conscious and the unconscious. The 'child' is 'a symbol which unites the opposites, a mediator, bringer of healing, that is, one who makes whole.' (Jung 1959:164)

The malleability of the ‘child’ motif to take on different guises in different ages and societies becomes clear when we consider the following assertion by Jung:

No archetype can be reduced to a simple formula...It has a potential existence only, and when it takes shape in matter it is no longer what it was. It persists throughout the ages and requires interpreting ever anew. The archetypes are the imperishable elements of the unconscious, but they change their shape continually. (Jung 1959:179)

That archetypes ‘change their shape continually’ and yet are anchored to a fundamental human need for synthesis in the psyche suggests that there is much more to the phenomena of child stars than a social constructionist reading alone would allow. The possibility of conceptualizing the ‘child star’ as a universal symbol transgresses cultural specificity and suggests that a wider understanding of their significance is required. As Jung reiterates, the work of the ‘child’ motif is never completed – it will re-appear in different guises as long as the cycle of life and death continues:

The symbol always says: In some such form as this will a new manifestation of life, a deliverance from the bondage and weariness of life, be found...Love and joy is the message of the ‘wonder-child’, the new symbol. (Jung 1923 in Radford 1990:31)

6.2 The Power of Taboo

The previous section explored the genealogy of the wonder child motif and related current constructions of child stars to a seemingly universal need to reify and exalt a small number of special children. This section takes a slightly different angle on the power of the child star by considering the way in which the child star motif gains significance because of the way it is situated in relation to a wider system of signs and meaning. As Levi-Strauss demonstrates throughout his body of work, the universality of myth relates not to the prevalence of specific motifs, but to the recurrences in different cultures of similar structural relationships between different motifs.

In order to understand the power of the child star in contemporary culture it is useful to consider the centrality of the dual concepts of the taboo and the sacred in creating meaning in all cultures. This links us inevitably to reflecting on the role of myth in establishing and reaffirming social order. As Leach explains in stories:

any reference to a transgression of taboo, however oblique, creates vicarious excitement. In this respect the myths of our own society have quite a different quality for us from the myths of other people....unless you share the same moral assumptions as the myth narrator, you will not be 'shocked' by what he says and you will then have difficulty in picking up the message. For it is the **shock** effect of references to breaches of moral taboo which gives myth its 'meaning'...the moral point is made clear by emphasising the over-whelming disasters which are directly associated with the mythical breach of normality. (Leach 1973 in Culler 1981:52)

Given this, it begins to become clearer as to why media stories about child stars hold such power to shock. The child who has transgressed into adult territory creates 'vicarious excitement', the immoral behaviour of greedy parents who are supposed to protect their children shocks us and we feel a sense of satisfaction at learning of the downfall of such ambiguous individuals who represent a threat to our shared social order. Due to the fact that the child star offends our particular shared beliefs and values around children and child rearing it makes sense that it is perhaps only our society at this particular time which experiences 'shock' at the antics of child stars. For example, transgressions around the themes of precocious sexuality and drug taking are particularly shocking in relation to child stars because they invert the very tenets of innocence and purity on which their significance as a cultural category is based, as demonstrated in the following extracts which were also quoted in the preceding chapter to illustrate the boundaries of childhood in our culture:

They sing provocatively, wear make-up and tattoos – and are aged between nine and eleven....Although the band is energetic and enthusiastic, the girls have been filmed swaying their underdeveloped

hips in an effort to appear sexy. (Sunday Herald Sun (Australia) 24.10.1999)

She was arrested in the show's third season for cocaine possession. Left and returned several times. Fell asleep during rehearsals, refused to take drug tests, and reportedly appeared incoherent at points. (abcnews.com, 03.09.2002)

She entered a rehab clinic at the age of 13 to fight drug and alcohol abuse. In one episode, she swiped her mother's credit card and hopped on a plane to the West Coast with the intention of continuing on to Hawaii. She was apprehended by private investigators in Los Angeles and led back to rehab in handcuffs. (abcnews.com, 03.09.2002)

He sued his father, scrawled graffiti in his New York apartment, and dyed his hair blue. (abcnews.com, 03.09.2002)

She was smoking grass at 10, addicted to cocaine at 13, and went from child parts to trashy movies like Poison Ivy. (The Observer, 01.10.2000)

The very fact that we are shocked to read of such behaviour indicates that not only do we share the same 'moral assumptions' as the myth narrator (in this case the mass media), but that we also demand stories which excite us in this way and thus reinforce our alignment to shared normative standards. However, it also seems that the child star has to do nothing more deviant than exist, and then grow up, to be set apart as transgressive and taboo-laden due to the fundamental difference between the child star and the 'normal' child.

It seems possible then that although the wonder child archetype is universal, due to our current construction of childhood the way in which it is expressed and received at this time in this society renders it a taboo. It could be argued though, that this status imbues the child star with even more power because of the inherent power of the taboo. Indeed, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, 'taboo' means 'the system or act of setting apart a person or thing as **accursed** or **sacred**' both of which seem applicable to the child star at various stages of his/her career and both of which arise out of the separateness and specialness of the child star.

Leach's thesis as to how certain people and things are set apart from the accepted social order is that 'we make binary distinctions and then mediate the distinction by creating an ambiguous (and taboo-loaded) intermediate category.' (1963:55) For example, in-between the binary opposites of 'man' and 'not man' lies the intermediate category of 'pets'. 'Pets' are therefore taboo because they are not distinct 'wild' animals and nor are they human and so their names become terms of abuse in our language (e.g. bitch). Leach argues that even though such binary distinctions are taught to us as children through our specific languages (and so may differ according to varying cultural concepts), they stem from a basic life/death discrimination.³

In a pictorial representation then, Leach's system would look like this:

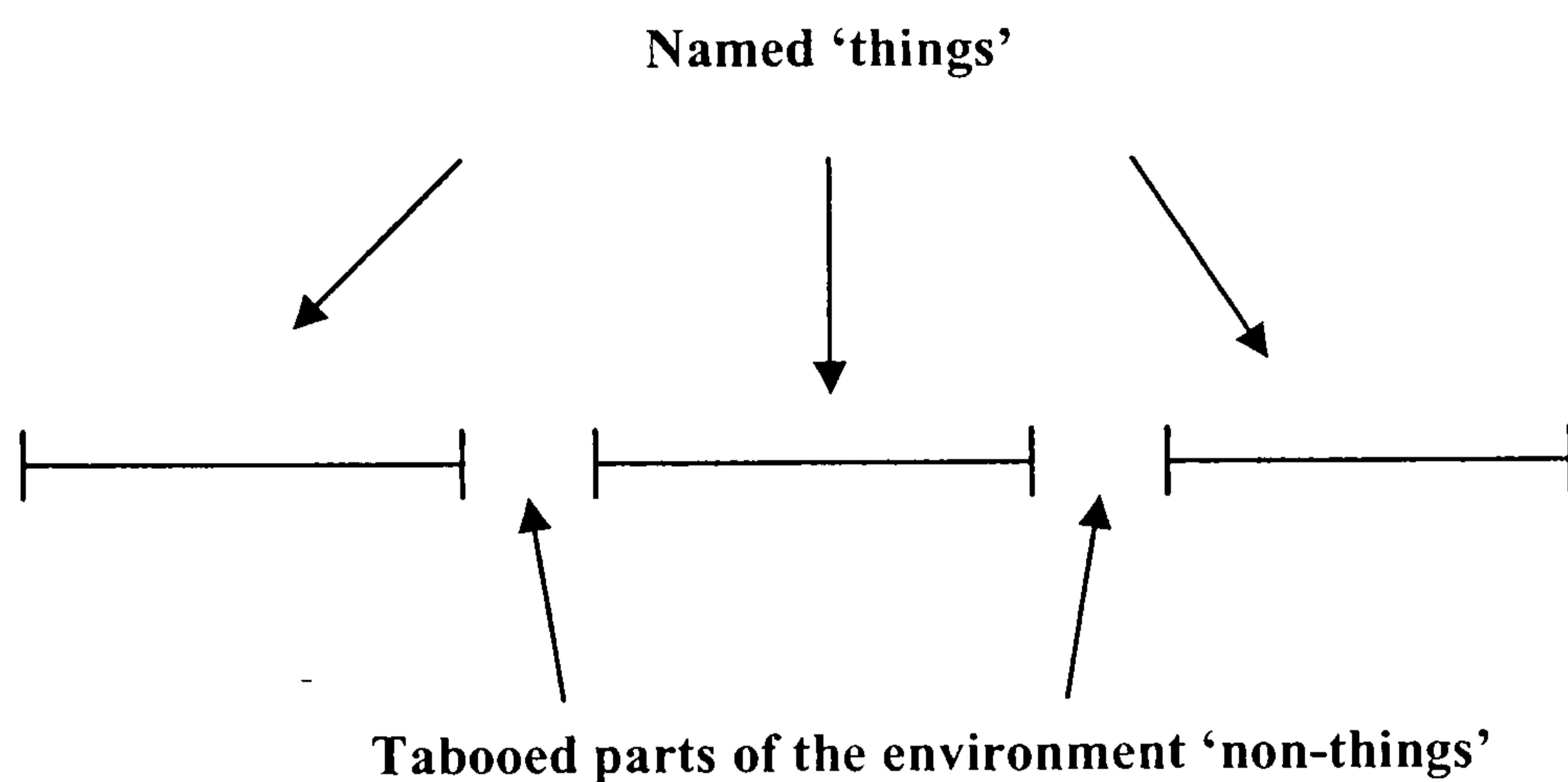


Fig 1.9 *The relationship of tabooed objects to the world of names.* (Leach 1963:48)

Such distinctions must be viewed as cultural, according to Leach, because there are no gaps in the physical world. In this way then normality and abnormality have to be viewed in context, even though the process by which they function to create taboo, ambiguous categories is universal. There are however, certain similarities and recurring patterns in the

³ Jung would describe this as the structure of the psyche into conscious and unconscious, light and dark – a universal structure of human minds through which we create meaning in the physical world

mythology of different cultures. For instance, the ‘gap’ between ‘this-world’ and ‘other-world’ is generally bridged by supernatural beings of a highly ambiguous kind (virgin mothers, supernatural monsters etc) and are the objects of the most intense taboos, as well as being the most sacred:

beings of the middle zone (i.e. not gods or men) who often appear in myth as deified ancestors (part man, part god) become ‘abnormal’ whenever they lose their ambiguity. The mediating hero is, in all religious systems, a being of the middle zone. One aspect of his essential ambiguity is that he (or she) is always, at one and the same time, impossibly virtuous and impossibly sinful; it is a definitional characteristic of the hero that he is ‘abnormal when judged by ordinary criteria’. (Leach 1963:52)

So being in the ‘middle zone’ is not necessarily a negative position to be in. If one is able to hold on to the ‘essential ambiguity’ of being ‘impossibly virtuous and impossibly sinful’ then one may be viewed as a ‘hero’ figure. Leach refers to the many Biblical examples of this ambiguous hero principle, for example, Abraham marrying his half sister which is incest and Solomon marrying 700 wives from nations with whom Israelites were forbidden to intermarry – these two transgressions are concerned with the single rule of endogamy, albeit describing the breaking of the rule in different ways. Leach explains that the ‘message of the myth is made obliquely by repetitive, yet contrasted, references to the **same** moral injunction which is transgressed in **different** ways.’ (1963:53)

This concept of transgressing the boundaries between binary opposites then can be applied to child stars in two ways. Firstly, they fall ‘in-between’ distinct ‘child’ ‘adult’ categories in our culture because of, among other things, their ability to be economically powerful and independent and the fact that they work in the adult world. This could go some way towards explaining the hostility with which their lives are recounted in the press. It could also explain the reification of child stars as ‘little angels’, ‘heaven sent’ and ‘gifts to humanity’ – if they are conceptualised as occupying that elevated position in-between ‘this

world' and 'other world' then they are bound to be viewed with awe and reverence. Only when they grow up do they lose their 'abnormality' and so with it their deified status along with their power to both shock and delight. More generally, as described in the previous section on Jungian archetypes, the 'wonder-child' also falls in-between the categories of human and supernatural, traditionally possessing a closeness to the divine and a link to the other world from which they have so recently come. This 'in-between' ness is seen as sacred, whereas the habitation of a category which is between being a child and an adult is seen as accursed, bringing us closer still to the paradox which underlies the status of the child star.

The ambiguous status of the child star which underlies their power as a cultural symbol is aptly demonstrated in this montage of pictures of Shirley Temple (Fig 2.0) and the accompanying text which appeared in *Photoplay* magazine in 1934. The pictures show Temple displaying a range of expressions and poses ranging from angelic with her hands pressed together in prayer, to grumpy and from tired to playful. Her status as being between a child and an adult is revealed in the sexual undertones of both the text and some of the pictures. For example, we are told that Temple is cute 'any way you take her' and that she is good at pouting and playing at 'the art of the coquette' with the aside '(they're never too young!)' implying a sexual awareness that renders Temple a fetishised image of purity and innocence. However, the focus on her childlike traits whereby the photographer apparently interrupted her 'romp' in the garden and the description of her as a 'good little girl', emphasise her childishness as do the pictures which focus either on her cherubic face or her body wearing little girl clothes.

Temple's status as being a special, other worldly 'wonder-child' is evident in the reification of her physical appearance and the fascination with her daily activities, and of course the fact that she merits a full page magazine spread dedicated to showing just how cute she is. Temple's iconic status was almost certainly due to her embodiment of both the sacred (the beautiful child) and the taboo (the sexualised child) and the power of her image undoubtedly derived from this contradiction.

Only by examining such structural elements of the relationship of the child star to wider cultural and social normative standards is it possible to understand how the child star has become both a victim and an object of hope in our society. I would argue that previous incarnations of child stars have been without pity as the child has signified goodness, strength, purity and/or divine power. It is symptomatic of our protectionist and scientific attitude towards children that the child star of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has become largely an object of concern, pity and ridicule. However, the very fact that we demand child stars at all reinforces the powerful role the wonder-child archetype still has to play in our collective sub-conscious.

The next section looks at the way in which stories about child stars are told and examines how modern concerns about protecting childhood and child sexuality are presented in traditional narrative structures which seem to generate a preferred reading of the text in which the child star becomes the site of the struggle between good and evil. The subject of the analysis is Charlotte Church, a performer whose image encompasses both the religious connotations of Jung's 'child' motif as well as the ambiguous power of being a child/adult.

6.3 The Power of Stories

This section will analyse a range of stories which appeared in the British press between 1998 and 2005 about the young Welsh soprano Charlotte 'Voice of an Angel' Church. This span of stories is particularly interesting because it begins with her 'discovery' at the age of twelve in 1998, through her immensely successful classical singing career, to her teenage rebellion which included a rejection of classical music and a falling out with her mother, her reinvention as a sexy siren in 2003, and again as a pop star in 2005.

I wish to demonstrate how the media coverage of these eventful years in the life of Church encapsulate the way in which contemporary stories about child stars are used both to reinforce normative ideals as to the position of children in society and to express wider

concerns about the 'evils' of capitalist culture. The very fact that Church is explicitly set up as an 'angel' in the early days endows her with the power to be the site of the struggle between good and evil which is played out over the ensuing years. I will demonstrate how the overall structure of the collection of stories and the characters therein adhere to traditional narrative patterns which engender certain expectations and explanations of behaviour which again serve to reinforce the message that there is an important lesson to be learnt from the experiences of child stars. The ability of Charlotte Church to first delight, then to shock, then to dismay, reflects her power as a child star and it is this power which allows her to become a symbol of corrupted innocence in a mythical style story which still has relevance in a contemporary social context.

Nietzsche (1977) wrote about the modern 'mythless man' who 'hungers after times past and digs and grubs for roots', trying to find profound meaning in an increasingly secular, rational world in which science has explained away much of the traditional beliefs and ideas which gave shape and purpose to people's lives. Although it may seem that there is no place left for such explanatory stories in contemporary Western culture the search for meaning continues and with it the attribution of symbolic significance onto certain people, events and objects. In this light, it certainly seems possible to conceptualise the contemporary media construction of child stars such as Charlotte Church as manifestations of the eternal, universal need for a wonder-child to inspire joy and a belief in a better future. As Malinowski explains, myths satisfy on a number of fundamental levels and are not simply random primitive explanations for natural phenomena:

(Myth) is a hard-working, extremely important cultural force...a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, even practical requirements. (Malinowski 1927 in Chase 1949:79)

This structuralist concept of myth as a universal expression of emotion in narrative form which varies in detail from culture to culture but which carries the same essential message, is a useful way of approaching stories in our own social context. By considering what

underlying themes and meanings inform the media coverage of Charlotte Church's life, it is hoped that a rich reading of the data will be possible which connects the child star to mythical tales and fables which follow predictable and traditional patterns.

To understand the rise and fall of Charlotte Church from a structuralist perspective then, it is useful to conceptualise her as a modern day hero facing challenges and obstacles of a timeless nature in the pursuit of the attainment of wisdom and a higher spiritual dimension. At first glance, of course it is ludicrous to compare the achievements and disappointments of a young Welsh singer with the trials of Hercules or the adventures of Krishna and it is not my intention to engender such a comparison. However, as Campbell notes in his investigation of the monomyth of 'The Hero';

when scrutinized in terms not of what it is but of how it functions, of how it has served mankind in the past, of how it may serve today, mythology shows itself to be as amenable as life itself to the obsessions and requirements of the individual, the race, the age. (1993:382)

Campbell demonstrates the universality of mythical and folk stories about heroes throughout history, emanating from every society of which there is a record of their culture. From the ancient Egyptian god Osiris, to Jesus Christ to Little Red Riding Hood, to Buddha, he claims that the trajectory of the stories follow a pattern which, from a psychoanalytic reading, concurs with a psychological longing to attain wholeness through transformation and ideally involves begetting wisdom which can then be dispersed among the unenlightened of the world. As Campbell explains:

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return. (1993:30)

The story of the hero then has several distinct stages which are open to infinite cultural and social variations as well as symbolic interpretation. However, the bare bones of the tale are generally as follows:

There is a call to adventure, to step off the well worn path into the unknown, which is either heeded immediately or ignored, and an initial obstacle to be overcome which is often surpassed with the help of supernatural aid in some form or another. The initiation begins in earnest in the next stage which Campbell refers to as the 'Road of Trials' in which betrayals and temptations challenge the integrity and/or physical strength of the hero. When the hero has been tested and has shown him/herself to be worthy and has achieved at-one-ment, it is time for the return to society where he/she arrives, transfigured, and teaches the lesson he/she has learned of life renewed.

Although Church's story cannot satisfactorily be fully aligned to the classic hero tale (apart from anything else, her story has not finished yet), several relevant themes and patterns are discernable in the way her story has been presented in the media over the last few years. It is important to point out here that it is not being suggested that the life and experiences of Church are especially 'heroic' or that Church herself is a sage of some description, but that in order to understand why her story has been presented in the particular structure it has it is useful to recognise the need for the hero story to be told again and again in a variety of guises.

6.3.1 The Celebration

Church's 'call to adventure' came when she was 12 years old and living in Cardiff with her parents and extended family. The support act to her aunt on a TV talent search programme, Church's extraordinarily beautiful 'adult' soprano voice stole the show and a manager and a five album deal with Sony swiftly followed. For the next two years the media exalted and feted Church in a frenzy of adoration. Church's success was a worldwide phenomenon and her debut album *Voice of an Angel* sold 2 million copies in two weeks in the UK alone. The incredible success of the young singer was always closely allied to both the religious connotations of her repertoire which included songs such as Pie Jesu and Ave Maria, and to the 'purity' of her voice. The following article headlines were typical of the adulation

which surrounded the young Church as the time, with the line between her *sounding* like an angel and actually *being* an angel becoming blurred as she began to signify the metaphor used to describe her:

HEAVEN SENT VOICE OF AN ANGEL (The Herald Sun 17.12.99)

VOICE OF AN ANGEL RINGS ROUND THE WORLD (Total Wales 02.11.99)

EARTH'S TEEN ANGEL (The New York Post 10.3.99)

SINGING ANGEL SOARS (The New York Post 21.11.99)

THE RISE AND RISE OF LITTLE VOICE (The Daily Telegraph 19.02.99)

Charlotte was named as a child prodigy and the combination of her age, her voice and her religious songs created an image for Church that was incredibly successful. In the 18 months following the release of *Voice of An Angel* Church performed for Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles at the opening of the Welsh Assembly, for President Clinton at the White House and for Pope John Paul II in the Vatican. To add to her iconic status as a divine child she had a meeting with the Pope during which he kissed her grandmother's rosaries and called her 'La Cantante'.

Newspaper and magazine stories and interviews with Church and her family at this time are overwhelmingly positive. Charlotte is presented as 'just a normal kid', albeit in extraordinary circumstances:

As she sits for an interview, Church twirls bubble gum around her fingers, steps over a few teddy bears, and pushes her homework out the way. (Wall of Sound Magazine Oct 1999)

Charlotte Church, the little girl from Wales with the big voice from heaven, wants some crispy chicken bits. The 13 year-old prodigy has

worked from dawn to past her bedtime today, singing for her supper in TV appearances in New York and Los Angeles ...and now she wants her crispy chicken bits. (New York Now 23.12.99)

We had takeaway McDonald's for lunch: 'Cool, fab!' trilled Charlotte when she discovered she could have a Barbie Happy Meal. (The Daily Mail 10.11.99)

I still go to school, I have sleep-overs at my friends' houses and I spend time with my family. (Total Wales 15.11.99)

Set in juxtaposition to her talent, Charlotte's 'childishness' and 'normality' become fascinating in the stories which are littered with references to her childlike comments, behaviour and possessions. The paradox of the child star who is 'bigger than big and smaller than small' could not be more apt when describing the construction of Church in the first two years of her fame and is encapsulated in this description of a performance by Church at a huge international event:

She comes on in a striped, floor-length gown whose adult formality only serves to emphasise her youth. Then the orchestra begins and from her tiny frame emerges a voice of startling maturity...You can just feel 18,000 hearts melt at the wonderful contrast between the chatty kid with the Cardiff accent, and the diva with the glorious voice. (The Daily Mail 10.11.99)

Images of Church which accompanied articles and interviews at this early stage of her career highlighted her innocence and childishness. For example, Fig 2.1 shows Church barefoot and beaming, hugging an enormous teddy bear. Her smallness is emphasised by positioning her next to the oversized toy and her immaturity is signified by her proximity to this prop. That she is cuddling him from behind highlights her vulnerability and the overall effect of the picture is the emphasis of her 'little girl-ness'. However the accompanying text demonstrates the greatness of her talent and ambition, reading: 'Church triumphant: 'I'd really like to sing Madame Butterfly, or Mimi or Tosca at La Scala and get a standing ovation'. This is clearly not what we would conventionally expect an eleven year old child

to say, especially one who seems so at home with teddy bears and the whole business of being a child. Therefore, the picture and the text work together to create an image of Charlotte as both childlike and mature, a combination which positions her outside the 'normal' and yet deriving power from the very ambiguity of her status.

Other images such as Fig 2.2 focus exclusively on her innocent beauty and the religious connotations of her purity and giftedness. In this picture Church is gazing upwards (towards God?) with her hands touching in front of her chest either in prayer or excitement or perhaps both, and her hair is cascading around her shoulders, as natural and unfettered as she is herself. She is wearing a fluffy white jacket and looks entirely angelic – a golden child who represents all that is good about the world and humanity.

Church's status as a 'wonder-child' is confirmed again and again in similar ways through texts and pictures at this time, and her talent for beautiful singing is unquestionably linked to her having a beautiful nature, thus elevating her to the status of a higher grade human being, or, in celebrity terms, a 'star'. Her 'bigness' resides in her voice and within the rules of her media construction, this seems to define her morality, character and future. As the following glowing report of Church's voice seems to imply: Surely the voice of an angel must belong to an angel?

When she bursts into song...we are instantly captivated by her truly extraordinary voice and her transparent joy in singing. I only hope that when I hear angels sing on the other side of the grave they sound half as good as this. (The Reporter USA 23.6.99)

Even given her 'extraordinary' talent, Church is presented in media stories as an unspoilt, natural child, rather than as a novelty act or precocious brat, further emphasising her quasi-religious status as a 'gift from god' who has something marvellous to share with the world. Indeed, the following quote is reminiscent in style of the adoring hyperbole which surrounded the child stars of the Hollywood Child Star era in the 1920s and 30s:

She's amazing, this child-diva. More child than diva, thank the Lord, and after the year she's had, it's a relief to find a sunny, guileless young girl wriggling around in her chair instead of the monster I was half-dreading. (The Telegraph 19.02.99)

Given her ambiguous status as a child with an adult singing voice, the childlike qualities which Church displays are clearly here seen as something unexpected, wonderful and exciting. The terminology used to describe this encounter further reinforces the fairytale imagery – the child is ‘amazing’, the journalist was ‘half-dreading’ meeting her, she could so easily have been a ‘monster’ and yet she was ‘sunny’ and ‘guileless’. The underlying message seems to be that the forces of evil have not yet reached her, she is still safely ensconced in childhood and so we are free to enjoy her in her ‘natural’ state. Church is still ‘pure’ and hasn’t yet been polluted by the outside world, a fact that is confirmed by emphasis on her position as still very much under the protection and control of her family. To this end she is quoted as describing her unusually frequent contact with her extended family:

When we're home, I see my auntie, my uncle, my grandmother, my grandfather, my cousin, my mum and my dad, every day. Then I'll see my Auntie Frances, my Auntie Margaret, Rachel, probably Alison, Susan, Paul, Linda, probably once or twice a week. They're all cousins and second cousins. We are very family-orientated. (The Telegraph 19.02.99)

Church's life is described as a ‘fairy-tale’ and her parents are presented as supportive, protective and very much acting in the best interests of their child. Interestingly no mention is made at this point of the fact that James Church is Charlotte's step-father and that he has two other children at home in Wales. Charlotte is always referred to as their only child. Her mother, Maria, is described as ‘sensible’ and ‘pretty, small, neat with dark wavy hair’ (The Daily Telegraph 19.2.99). They are at pains to emphasise that they are not interested in their own gains from Charlotte's career and that Charlotte is a ‘normal’ teenager:

All I'm working for is my daughter's happiness and I'm proud of that.
(James Church in The Daily Mail 10.11.99)

When asked if Charlotte is still a typical teenager, Maria is adamant in her reply: 'Honestly, honestly, yes she is...She eats junk food, goes shopping with her friends, has to tidy her room and gets told off when she's naughty. Fame hasn't changed Charlotte. (Maria Church Total Wales 15.01.99)

None of this was planned, so there was never a case of pushing Charlotte...it was always Charlotte's choice. This all kind of fell in our lap. So we've just always supported and encouraged her. (www.Ivillage.com 17.11.99)

It is interesting that Maria Church refers to Charlotte's 'discovery' as an unplanned chance event as this is precisely the nature of the hero's call to adventure. As Campbell explains:

A blunder - apparently the merest chance - reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood. (1993:51).

It is towards this unsuspected hostile world which Charlotte moves as she approaches adolescence and cracks begin to show in her relationship with both the media and her audience.

6.3.2 The Transformation

As Marina Warner (1994) points out in her study of the form and function of fairy tales; 'metamorphosis defines the fairy tale' even more so than the happy ending, and the next stage of Church's journey is based around the key transformation of Church as she reached adolescence - always a challenging transition for a child star. The following kinds of newspaper headlines were common to articles about her at this time which focussed on her clothes, hair and make up:

GLAMOROUS NEW IMAGE FOR CHARLOTTE (Total Wales 05.05.00)

OUT ON THE TOWN CHARLOTTE AGED 15 (GOING ON 19)
(Daily Mail 25.07.01)

A noticeable change in tone is apparent in such articles which document Church's change from child into young woman, with the adjective 'sexy' used for the first time to describe her appearance after she collected a Classical Music award in May 2000 (aged 14):

She has ditched the cute plaits for a layered hairstyle, and her pretty face, which was once free of make-up, is now usually made up with coloured eye shadow and red lipstick. With her new sexy appearance, she could be mistaken for a 17 year old. (Western Mail News 05.05.00)

The wistful nostalgia for the 'angelic' child she so recently was is evident in the lament that her 'pretty' face which was 'once free of make-up' is now laden with it - a sign of mature sexuality, tawdriness and falseness - a far cry from the 'natural' charms of the Charlotte of just a few months ago.

The message is clear - the 'angel' is being corrupted by all the evils in society. Just as Church had all the hope and joy of childhood projected onto her for the benefit of her world-weary audience as a 12 year old, now at 14 she represents the fight between good (innocence, purity, naivety) and evil (mass culture, money and sex). An article in the Daily Mail in July of 2001 makes this contrast explicit by placing a photo of the 12 year old Charlotte in her school uniform next to a picture of her dressed up to go out aged 15. There is no doubt about the corrupting influences on Charlotte in the story:

With hair transformed using tongs and extensions into a frizzy mass of ringlets and make-up which includes lipstick, gloss and smoky eyes she has clearly developed that common adolescent desire to fast-forward her appearance...The girl whose operatic voice has entertained the Queen, the Pope and a US president has shifted her musical tastes as well as her dress style. Eminem and Destiny's Child are her current idols...With a £10million fortune Miss Church will have little difficulty maintaining fashion requirements. (Daily Mail 25.07.01)

Church's departure from her childhood self is also emphasised in terms of her distance from the family oriented child she so recently was and the close relationship to her parents which represented her protection from the corrupting influences of the outside world:

Even her parents must struggle to recognise Charlotte Church aged 15 ½ as the child singing prodigy sold as *The Voice of an Angel*. (Daily Mail 25.07.01)

It is indicative of the media shift in attitude towards Church that in the above quote Charlotte is described as having been 'sold' as having the voice of an angel, a subtle differentiation from earlier articles which seemed to accept that she in fact *had* a voice of an angel because she essentially *was* an angel.

Sexuality, popular culture and money seem to be the culprits here, responsible for the transformation of Church from an 'angel' to a disappointingly 'normal', shallow, predictable teenager. A certain contempt for teenagers and adolescents is barely concealed in these extracts reflecting, I would argue, a wider distaste and fear of this age group in general in our society. It would seem that this article and others like it are meant to be read as a lament for childhood and that Church has become here a scapegoat for the fear generated by the inevitable movement of children away from adult control and towards independence.

Interestingly, this transformation in Charlotte's appearance coincided with a well publicised court case in which her sacked former manager, Jonathan Shalit, sued the Churchs for £4million. The negative publicity surrounding the case focussed on Charlotte's mother, who was described as 'fiery' and driven only by 'the pursuit and retention of money' (The Guardian 22.11.00). Mrs Church was said to have invented spurious reasons to justify firing the loyal and hardworking Shalit, who claims to have masterminded Charlotte's rise to international stardom. The media were quick to re-cast Maria Church as the archetypal pushy parent:

GREED DROVE MOTHER OF CHILD STAR, COURT TOLD
(The Guardian 22.11.00)

and for the first time, James Church is referred to as the star's 'adoptive father', further deconstructing the image of family cohesion and child-centred togetherness which characterised earlier profiles. Indeed Charlotte's step-sister, Elisha, creates a Cinderella-esque image when she describes family life at the Church's:

I think Maria did push Charlotte into a lot of things. I don't think Charlotte had much of a childhood. It was always dancing, singing or extra lessons. Whenever we went around she would be upstairs practising the piano. (The Independent 21.2.02)

The stereotypical 'pushy-parent' is an almost ubiquitous character in media narratives about child stars, and one which seems to fit with the figure of the 'tyrant-monster' as identified by Campbell in the mythologies, folk traditions and legends of the world. The tyrant-monster is described as avid for the greedy rights of 'my and mine' and is 'driven by the impulses to egocentric self-aggrandisement' (Campbell 1993:15). Indeed, the image of Maria Church managing and manoeuvring her daughter's career and enjoying access to people, places and a lifestyle which would have been utterly unattainable to her except through her daughter's extraordinary success and talent, almost defines her as an unsavoury character regardless of her potentially blameless intentions.

Campbell's description of the motivation of the tyrant-monster seems particularly apt in reference to the pushy-parent who is preoccupied both with protecting their protégée and also caught up in (perhaps even corrupted by) the world of riches and fame which such close association brings:

alert at every hand to meet and battle back anticipated aggressions of his (sic) environment, which are primarily the reflection of the uncontrollable impulses to acquisition within himself. (Campbell 1993:15)

However, even the strength of the ‘tyrant-monster’ fighting her corner couldn’t protect Charlotte from the inevitable fall from grace which was to follow her sensational success as a child star as she grew up and away from her angelic image.

6.3.3 The Disintegration

THE FALL FROM GRACE OF MISS.CHURCH
(The Independent 06.12.02)

CHARLOTTE OPENS WITH TEARS AND TANTRUMS
(The Daily Mail 05.12.02)

These newspaper headlines refer to the disastrous start to Charlotte’s US tour in 2002 when she had an ‘emotional breakdown’ at Gatwick because she didn’t want to leave her boyfriend, was unreliable and distracted during rehearsals and, in true child star fashion, threw a tantrum when asked to meet a group of relatives of cast members, apparently saying; ‘F*** this, I didn’t agree to no meet and greet,’ before storming off. To further demonise Church, the papers were also delighted to include the information that the ‘waiting party included a handicapped child and the wheel-chair bound mother of the Royal Philharmonic’s conductor’ (The Daily Mail 05.12.02).

Described in the tabloids as the ‘Blue Angel’ due to her strong language, Charlotte was portrayed as rude, ungrateful and greedy – effectively she was presented as the ultimate spoiled brat, a mutation of the beautiful child she had so recently been. Details such as the following added to the negative image of Church as a monstrous egotist:

Backstage she demanded a steady stream of chocolate cake and Italian ham. (The Mirror 06.12.02)

That Church also fell out with her mother at this time and was involved with her first serious boyfriend (the unpleasant Steven Johnson who later made thousands selling kiss and tell stories about Charlotte to the papers) cast Charlotte even further into the wilderness

in terms of her public persona and her professional image. Being termed a ‘former prodigy’ (The Mirror 06.12.02) heralded both the final nail in the coffin of her golden childhood and the beginning of a life trying to either live up to, or escape from, her former incarnation.

The papers were also keen to report that her fans were deserting her (‘thousands of empty seats...poor ticket sales’ (The Daily Mail 05.12.02)), further cementing the image of Charlotte alone and isolated in a less than welcoming adult world. The ‘Road of Trials’ had indeed begun for Charlotte, and seemed to stretch far into the distance in front of her.

Although she kept a low profile musically for the next couple of years, Charlotte was rarely out of the papers due to her lively social life and relationship troubles, including her betrayal by Steven Johnson:

CHARLOTTE IN TEARS AS SHE DUMPS LOVER
(News of the World 07.12.03)

There was also a huge amount of publicity surrounding Charlotte’s eighteenth birthday when she gained access to the £16m fortune she had earned as a child. In a fairy-tale type detail, the turning point in her life was identified as midnight:

As the clock struck midnight and Charlotte Church turned 18, it was all change for the angel-voiced singer. (Sunday Express 22.02.04)

The change, predictably, involved alcohol and sex – the ultimate corrupting influences on a former ‘angel’:

At midnight...she celebrated with a cigarette and her first legal swig of champagne. Several glasses later she hit the dance floor for a steamy clinch with boyfriend Kyle Johnson, 19. (Sunday Express 22.02.04)

Church is presented as a sex siren and a woman who has clearly moved far away from her

innocent child star image. Indeed, she is quoted in the News of the World as describing her new boyfriend as being ‘very sexy’ and ‘brilliant at everything- if you know what I mean’.

Pictures of Church slumped against her limousine after losing her footing outside the nightclub where she had been celebrating her birthday were all over the papers the next day, accompanied by gleeful captions around the theme of ‘fallen angel’, for example,

This is the moment the Voice of an Angel became a fallen angel. Charlotte Church’s ungainly tumble came on a 14-hour booze bender to mark her 18th birthday. (News of the World 22.02.04)

Charlotte the angel turns 18 and falls from grace. (Sunday Express 22.02.04)

In a humorous, yet telling, response to a question about what she was going to spend her money on, Charlotte declared that she wanted to buy a ‘£1m ruby-studded bra,’ (The Sunday Times 22.02.04). This brings to mind the tale of the red shoes by Hans Christian Anderson which the little girl wished for with all her heart, and then was danced to death in, unable to take them off. The red theme followed Charlotte over the next few months as she posed for seductive pictures and gave an in-depth interview to ‘The Face’ magazine. The Mail on Sunday was indignant, calling her SCARLETT CHARLOTTE (04.05.04) and lamenting the death of her ‘innocent child star image’ thereby portraying Charlotte’s sexuality as inherently, and permanently, deviant.

6.3.4 The Alienation

Subsequent stories involving Charlotte’s ‘binge drinking’ and ‘cavorting’ with various boyfriends paint a picture of a rather sad and lonely figure as well as someone as far removed from the image of an angel as it is possible to be:

The Voice of an Angel star ended up staggering around the streets of Cardiff alone in the early hours last Sunday after spending the night knocking back vodka and Red Bull with pals. (News of the World 01.08.04)

CHARLOTTE LURCH: BOOZED UP STAR BACK IN GUTTER
(Daily Star headline 16.12.04)

Drunken Charlotte Church crashed to the ground outside a nightclub in the early hours of yesterday – following another marathon boozing session. (Daily Star 16.12.04)

The way such behaviour served to alienate Church's loyal fan base from when she was a child who represented the ultimate symbol of purity and hope is encapsulated in this cartoon (Fig 2.3) which appeared in the Daily Star on the same day as the above story:

The cartoon shows Church making a special appearance in church to sing Christmas carols to the local community. The conservative, elderly congregation are confused and bemused by her slovenly appearance and drunkenness and the vicar comments to the organist that 'we should've hidden the communion wine.'

The cartoon works on several levels and makes much of the ironic inappropriateness of Church's surname, which was in the past so apt due to her religious songs and innocent, angelic image. By placing her in a church the contrast of her current persona to the religious connotations of her previous childhood image is made stark. The way in which Church is seen to have desecrated something sacred that she used to represent is highlighted in the way she is shown wearing a crucifix as a fashion accessory and by the teenage hip-hop style clothes and trainers she is wearing – a far cry from the 'Sunday best' type clothes deemed suitable for church/Church. Her hair is pulled back tight, her midriff is showing and she is wearing large hoop earrings, aligning her with a certain working class image of young womanhood and an overall style which is more aligned to street culture than to classical music. She is holding a bottle of beer and a cigarette in one hand and a microphone in the other and looks more like a karaoke singer than a 'star'. The

overall impression of the image is that of a lager lout who has trespassed into a church during a religious service, much to the bemusement of the congregation. The fact that they were expecting Charlotte ‘Voice of an Angel’ Church, the former child prodigy, further reinforces the general shock expressed in the media that she did not quite turn out the way everyone supposedly expected. That Church is apparently drunk on communion wine comments further on the way she has exploited her success as an innocent angelic child to fund her current debauched lifestyle.

Charlotte was not only alienated from her original fan base at this stage in her career, but also from her contemporaries – the other teenagers in her hometown of Cardiff. The strength of bad feeling and jealousy towards Charlotte, as described by her in the following quote from an interview at this time, is quite shocking and not a little sad and further renders her a figure of pity and controversy:

People ring me up all the time...and they’ll say; “You’re a fat little Welsh slag.” Strangers. And I’m, “Bug off!” I’m changing my number again, today. Everyone wants to fight with me. In shops, clubs, even down the UCI (cinema). (Church in *The Face* May 2003)

Interestingly, this alienation can also be related to the hero myth narrative, whereby, ‘the child of destiny has to face a long period of obscurity. This is a time of extreme danger, impediment or disgrace.’ (Campbell 1993:326)

This stage of Church’s career can certainly be seen as consisting of obscurity and danger, and if her story should end here it would indeed serve as a cautionary tale – the little girl who got too much too soon and destroyed herself on the proceeds. However, this is more of a fairy tale than a cautionary tale and Church’s story is far from over at this point. As Warner points out, anything can happen in fairy tales and ‘this very boundlessness serves the moral purpose of the tales, which is precisely to teach where boundaries lie.’ (1994:XVI)

Indeed, as Warner explains, the essential genre of the fairy tale is characterised by ‘heroic optimism’ and Church’s subsequent reinvention of herself as a glamorous pop-star is explored in the next section. That a period of alienation should lead to a heroic return to ‘stardom’ can be read as a modern version of an age old narrative theme whereby the ‘hero’ returns from the wilderness full of new energy and understanding. However, as will be demonstrated, it seems that the return did not herald the end of Church’s ‘Road of Trials’ but simply opened up the possibility for more exploitation of Charlotte as a site for the mythical on-going struggle between good and evil.

6.3.5 The Return

As noted above, during 2005 Church relaunched her career, this time with a raunchy pop music CD which did well in the charts. Her image was also revamped and she appeared in music videos dressed in basques and knee high boots, causing a stir amongst her original fans who had enjoyed her earlier classical music and previous incarnation as a child prodigy. To add to Charlotte’s celebrity status she got involved with Welsh rugby star Gavin Henson and the two of them became stock fodder for gossip magazines and tabloids for months on end.

However, the overriding power of Church to generate press interest was still based on her ambiguous status as being both naive and experienced, a victim and a sinner and, most importantly, a child and an adult. Stories about the singer continued to rely on this duality of her constructed identity to convey the message that the former child star was still having a difficult time growing up. For example, one story which appeared with the article headline:

ANGEL’S FLAT IS A MESSY HELL HOLE (Metro 29.06.05)

would not have been newsworthy for any celebrity other than Church. The article described how Charlotte had moved out of her luxury flat because she couldn’t be bothered

to clean it and instead moved in with her ‘nana’. She is quoted as saying:

It’s been nice. Nana does all my washing and rings me to say, ‘I’ve got cottage pie on, love, hurry up and get home’. (Church in Metro 29.06.05)

This story works to reinforce the image of Church as a spoilt child who is trying to act like a sophisticated adult (she bought a ‘luxury flat’) and failing. The reporting of her continuing reliance on her family and her immature and irresponsible attitude towards the more mundane aspects of adult life perpetuate the idea that Church really is still a child and thus creates an environment whereby stories about her drinking, smoking and sex life have maximum impact.

Indeed stories about Church’s apparent excesses continued to dominate her press coverage at this time. For example, Kyle Johnson’s exposé of his intimate relationship with ex-girlfriend Charlotte in the News of The World was headlined, unsurprisingly:

IN BED WITH AN ANGEL (News of the World 27.02.05)

In stark contrast to Charlotte’s original ‘angel’ image, this story ‘uncovered’ the ‘real’ Charlotte as an insatiable seductress, thereby serving to cast her out from her childlike identity once and for all, but also deriving its scandalous shock value from the fact that she was so recently an ‘angelic’ child. Another exposé by another former boyfriend entitled:

CHARLOTTE THE DRUG DIVA (The Mail on Sunday 11.09.05)

focused on a different arena of transgression – Church’s alleged drug taking – and again derived maximum impact from frequent reference to her angelic past:

She is famous for her drink binges...now her former lover reveals the Voice of an Angel star’s nights of cannabis, amyl-nitrate and passion. (The Mail on Sunday 11.09.05)

The accompanying picture of Church dragging on a cigarette and surrounded by wine glasses (Fig 2.4) further reinforces this image of her as having been tempted by vice and on the rocky path to self-destruction. Charlotte's drinking is also deemed newsworthy as it contributes to her construction as a pure angel who has become a tarnished, sinful and 'wild' due to the corrupting influences of alcohol:

the former child prodigy's 19th birthday party ...lasted 72 hours. Her favourite tippie is vodka and Red Bull, plus white wine, champagne and rum cocktails....Friends believe that at present Charlotte is untameable. 'She's utterly wild, completely out of control,' says a source. (Daily Mail 19.03.05)

Even Charlotte's supposed 'fairy tale romance' with a Welsh rugby star is presented in the media as a sham with constant speculation as to when he is going to 'dump' Church for someone else:

CHARLOTTE'S PAIN AS SHE AND GAVIN HIT THE ROCKS (new!
19.09.05)

with her childish insecurity and jealousy being cited as the reason they are 'headed for meltdown'. Phrases such as she 'threw a tantrum...when she found Gav chatting to an unidentified blonde,' and 'she burst into tears and yelled' continue to subtly reinforce Church's childlike persona as a spoilt, immature brat, and the accompanying photographs of Charlotte looking glamorous and polished next to pictures of her looking 'bedraggled' and 'tired' (Fig 2.5) present an image of someone who cannot cope with the strains of adult life and who is on the edge of breaking down.

The return of Charlotte as a wise, authentic adult who has learned the lessons of her early extraordinary experiences is, it seems, yet to occur. It is very much in the interests of the tabloids to continue to generate stories about Church as a distorted child living in a cruel adult world because, as explored in the previous analysis of Leach's explanation of taboo,

this image is particularly shocking to us in this culture at this time. That Church was publicly identified as a 'star' and 'angel' at such a young age transfused her with a power to surpass ordinary boundaries of expectation and experience and provided her with a cultural significance beyond her actual personhood. This significance has rendered every action she takes to be imbued with meaning deriving from her original persona as an 'angel child'. I have argued that it was this setting apart of Church as different and special at an early age which aligned her with universal, mythological tales of the 'hero' which, as Campbell describes, appear in every society of which there is a record of their culture.

According to Campbell, the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is 'a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return,' (1993:130).

In relation to Church's story as constructed in the media over the past few years it has been demonstrated how her early chance discovery was presented as her 'separation' from the 'normal' course of her life and that this began a journey down a 'Road of Trials' during which she was tempted and betrayed. This is the so-called 'initiation' stage of the hero tale whereby the hero is tested to see if he or she is strong enough to fulfil their destiny, as Campbell describes it:

The myths agree that an extraordinary capacity is required to face and survive such experiences. (Campbell 1993:327).

Through reference to newspaper stories about Charlotte it has been shown how Church's forays into sexual relationships, drinking and drug taking have been used to create an image of her as a 'fallen angel' who has given into temptation and also as a victim of painful betrayals from false friends and ex-lovers. The transformation of Charlotte from an angelic child to a hardened and yet still vulnerable adult has also been a more profound story of one individual's journey from innocence to experience, which is again part of a deeper narrative pattern which informs all stories about reaching maturity. In this sense,

Charlotte's story has probably had such power to attract interest because her 'heroic' narrative actually coincided with her rite of passage of adolescence, making her public, often painful, experience of growing up a magnified version of the universal journey into adulthood and independence. As Jung explains, myths involving the 'Child' archetype are particularly powerful because of their relevance to the struggle to endure, grow and succeed which is shared by all people:

In all 'child' myths the 'child' is on the one hand delivered helpless into the power of terrible enemies and in continual danger of extinction, while on the other he (sic) possesses powers far exceeding those of ordinary humanity...the 'child' is a personification of vital forces quite outside the limited range of our one-sided conscious mind...It represents the strongest, the most ineluctable urge in every being, namely the urge to realise itself. (Jung 1959:170)

One cannot help but hope that there will be a more fulfilling return for Charlotte than her comeback pop career seems to have given her and that in the very best traditions of mythological regeneration, 'the hero returns transfigured and teaches the lesson he (sic) has learned of life renewed.' (Campbell 1993:18). The alternative of a lifetime spent constantly trying to shake off her distorted childlike image seems too harsh a destiny for someone who brought so much joy to others in her childhood. After all, as Campbell explains:

The conclusion of the childhood cycle is the return or recognition of the hero, when, after the long period of obscurity his (sic) true character is revealed. (Campbell 1993:329)

Reference has also been made throughout the analysis to the similarity of some elements of Church's story to the characters and plots of the fairytale genre. According to Propp's study of transformations in fairy tales in *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) the fairytale establishes a narrative form which is central to all story-telling whereby the tale is structured by the functions the characters play in the plot. Due to the fact that the actual 'number of functions is extremely small' Propp demonstrates how the basic actions of

characters in fairy tales remain constant in the course of the plot, while everything else can vary so that, for example:

The sending on the search, and the departure, are constants. The sender and the leaver, the motivation for the sending etc are variables. (Propp in Maranda 1972:139)

Propp explains that the way tales change over time (their transformations), reflect changes in culture, everyday life and religion and yet their basic function and structure remains the same and cannot be understood without reference to the human context in which the tale exists. Propp lists many possible transformations which occur in fairy tales as they are adapted to the specific cultural context in which they are re-told including reduction or amplification of various details or motifs, substitution of certain elements for others, and intensification and weakening of stages of the plot. In relation to Church's story it is clear how the basic narrative structure concurs with the classic fairy tale story of a child being chosen for some reason, called to adventure, departing their old life and spending time in the 'dark forest' of obstacles until they reach a place of safety having been transformed by their experience.

The reduction and amplification of certain details of the story are interesting to identify as they locate the story in a contemporary Western context and ensure it has meaning for a new audience. For example, the adventure that one has to be special to be called upon now is being famous. Church wasn't chosen to marry the Prince or have magical powers. No, the ultimate fairy tale experience these days is to be 'discovered', plucked from obscurity and appear on television. The role of the wicked step mother in Church's tale (or 'tyrant monster' in Campbell's terminology) was reduced to a merely simmering contempt of Mrs Church's 'pushy stage mother' identity due to the fact that the evil forces in this tale were already characterised as being the vices of the age, namely: alcohol, drugs and sex. The terrors which haunted Charlotte's experience of being lost in the dark woods were not wolves or witches, but bottles and cigarettes, ex-lovers and false friends. The intensification of the temptations which led Charlotte off the safe path and down the road

to untold danger and destruction highlights wider social fears surrounding children growing up too quickly, getting in with the ‘wrong crowd’, falling prey to dangerous substances, becoming sexually active too soon and so-on. Charlotte’s family, and especially her grandmother, in this transformation become representative of the safe haven she has left behind, fulfilling our notion of the family home as a protected space and the only appropriate and secure location for a child in a malevolent world. Whether there will be a classic fairy tale happy ending for Church remains to be seen, but the power of her narrative to continue to interest the reading public suggests that her story of ‘little girl lost’ in a cruel, debauched world is one which still demands to be told.

The aim of the above analysis was to demonstrate the mythical structure inherent in the media construction of stories about child stars. By using Charlotte Church as a case study, it was possible to trace her story as told by the British press over several key years and to identify patterns and themes which characterised and shaped her portrayal. The genres both of fairytale and the mythical story of the hero were shown to inform and structure the trajectory of Church’s media constructed narrative thus reinforcing a preferred reading of Charlotte as a symbolic site of the moral struggle between the innocence of childhood and the evils of the adult world.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the phenomena of the child star from a structuralist perspective. Having differentiated the approach from the discourse analysis undertaken in the preceding chapter I went on to apply three theories of structuralism to the data set I had collected on child stars.

Firstly, I explored the relevance of Jung’s archetype of the ‘wonder-child’ to the modern day construction of the child star. Taking Jung’s idea that the recurring image of the heroic child in myth and fable is a manifestation of a structural element of the psyche which generates our need for wholeness and fulfilment I demonstrated how pictures and

descriptions of child stars can be understood as part of this universal phenomena. The way that constructions of child stars, particularly during the Hollywood child star era of the 1920s and 30s, drew on characteristics of the Christ child in order to elevate the young actors and actresses to a reified status was described and enduring traits of these modern day archetypes of child stars were demonstrated as still being discernable in contemporary preferences for child stars to be 'small yet big' and also to be 'natural' in their persona and performances. The power of the child star was identified in this section as residing in their ability to represent this deep human need for a symbol of natural goodness with a connection to the divine, a symbol which has historically and culturally nearly always taken the form of a 'special' child.

The next section explored how the power of child stars can also be understood as emanating from the ambiguous position they inhabit 'in-between' both childhood and adulthood and between this world and the divine. Using Edmund Leach's work on transgression and taboo as a basis for the analysis it was demonstrated how 'shocking' stories about child stars follow a process of castigation of the 'abnormal' which is a universal structural feature of the way meaning is constructed in stories and myths. The resulting status of the 'abnormal' being as both accursed and sacred was related to the contemporary construction of the child star as being both a figure of pity and admiration.

Finally, the analysis of media reports and articles about Charlotte Church over a period of several years brought together the themes of the 'wonder-child' and the child star as being both sacred and cursed, as well as demonstrating the timeless nature of preferred narrative structures in stories about exceptional children.

Taken together these three strands of analysis seem to say something rather important about the power of child stars and how their meaning is structured in our society. Jung's archetype of the 'wonder-child' provides a universal symbolic category to which child stars appear to belong and as such they can be understood as part of an ancient and on-going tradition of heroic children whose power resides in their significance as symbols of

wholeness and futurity. Furthermore, applying Leach's theory of cognitive categorisation to the way in which child stars are positioned in our culture as ambiguous and transgressive beings suggests another dimension to the power of the child star. As inhabitants of the 'middle-zone' between both the states of childhood and adulthood, and also, in reference to the 'wonder-child' archetype, between this world and the divine, child stars carry with them the power to shock and to delight. Child stars, it seems, share with traditional heroic figures the 'essential ambiguity' of being 'impossibly virtuous and impossibly sinful' and with it the power to rise beyond their material being into a position of cultural significance. The universal need for stories to be told about such individuals was demonstrated through the analysis of media narratives surrounding Charlotte Church. That the stories about Church were structured in such a way as to reinforce the 'monomyth of the hero' serves to further reinforce the conceptualisation of the child star as a powerful and significant figure in our culture which was the aim of this section of the analysis.

Through using a broadly structuralist approach in this chapter I hope to have demonstrated that the phenomena of child stars cannot be understood through conventional discourse analysis alone and that there is a story to be told beyond the text itself which informs and shapes our understanding of such individuals. The advantages and limitations of both approaches to analysing data of this kind, and the potential benefits of a dual technique in answering the questions about child stars posed in this research will be evaluated in the conclusion.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The two key questions posed in the Introduction and on which this research project was based were quite simply: Why do we have child stars? and Why are former child stars so frequently ridiculed and denigrated in the press? I investigated these questions through an analysis of secondary data from newspapers, magazines, books and websites and presented my findings in the preceding chapters. What follows is a summary of those findings, along with an identification of other key issues which were brought up by the research. I go on to discuss these themes in relation to wider concerns about children and childhood in contemporary society and explain the significance of the child star as a reference point for understanding the complexity of the current status of Western childhood. I then evaluate the study in terms of the tenets of validity which I outlined in the Methodology and locate the work in relation to potential future research.

7.1 Summary of Findings

The Literature Review took as a starting point the particular casting of the child star as both deviant and adored in Western society and explored the way in which a certain idealised version of childhood has been constructed over the last two centuries. Having established the antecedents to our current understanding of the 'normal' child, child stars were identified as a specific category of children who fall outside this homogenous category and who are therefore seen as some of the 'failures' of childhood. The genre of biographical and autobiographical writing about and by former child stars was shown to complement this normative standard of childhood by reinforcing the idea that child stars have unhappy childhoods and much misfortune as adults. Research into the experiences of other children whose childhoods have fallen outside the acceptable 'normal' boundaries was explored and it was found that exceptional early achievers in other fields such as academia are generally spared both the expectation of adult disaster and the hostility which seems to accompany child stars of the stage and screen. Through reference to research on the politics of innocence and the sexualisation and commercialisation of childhood, the reason for this negative construction of child stars was identified as being due to their association with the

‘eroticisation of innocence’ which their images and performances tend to embody. Due to this eroticisation being linked to paedophilia and the commercialisation of childhood – both practices which attack the very heart of the image of childhood as a sacred and protected space – the child star was identified as being an important figure in understanding the complexity behind the idealisation of childhood which permeates our culture.

The chapter on the social history of child stars demonstrated how the lowly child performer turned into the child star over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century as the dominant theatrical platform evolved from street to stage to screen. The fact that this shift in cultural form coincided with changing social attitudes towards childhood, with children becoming valued for their charms rather than their labour power, meant that the child performer suddenly represented something much more than a curiosity. In contrast to the prodigious adult impersonators of the early Victorian stage, the newly invented child star then became prized for embodying ideal traits of childhood such as naturalness and naivety.

The controversy surrounding child performers and later child stars was identified as characteristic of public attitudes towards this group due to stereotypical images of them as being precociously sexual and exploited by adults. Even given changes in social perceptions of young performers as deviant or adorable, the role of such children to enact and fulfil idealised adult representations of childhood was shown to be consistent throughout the ages thus confirming the significance of the child star as a salient feature of Western culture.

Given the ambiguous status of the child star as both an adored image of the ideal child and a threat to the very concept of childhood as a time of preternatural wisdom and purity a Methodology was designed which would encompass as much of the complicated and contradictory information about this social group as was possible. For this reason, a dual approach to analysing the data was employed based on the relevance of exploring both the powerlessness and the power of the child star.

The first analysis chapter used discourse analysis to examine how child stars are constructed by the media in an overwhelmingly negative and pitiful manner even given

their talent, good fortune and evident success. I found that a pervasive myth that there is a curse on child stars underpinned the tone and content of many stories and I identified the linguistic and narrative techniques which were used to naturalise and reinforce this idea. Such stereotypical structuring of the lives of child stars as full of disaster was identified as a discursive device used to punish those who transgress the normative boundaries of childhood in our society and to reinforce the collective consensus on the correct way for a child to live and behave. I went on to challenge the pervasive strength of the so-called 'curse' of the child star by presenting exceptions to the rule such as child performers in Victorian times and resolutely middle-class children who are often seen to have the protection of both their education and their parents. The default association of child stars with working class culture was also identified as a contributing factor to their negative construction in the press.

Having established the constructed nature of the idea that early celebrity leads to adult unhappiness I went on, using the work of Goffman (1963) as a guide, to examine how former child stars react to the stigma of being, in the eyes of the world, cursed and forever set apart as odd and 'abnormal' because of their unusual childhoods. By analyzing their interviews and autobiographies I found that certain patterns of response were evident in the ways former child stars justified, rationalised and explained their lives and experiences which I identified as attempts to establish their 'authenticity' as adults and re-gain the credibility which they felt had been lost even before they understood the implications of their early success. The way in which former child stars appeared to have internalised normative media constructions of themselves as somehow transgressive and damaged was evident in the techniques they employed to challenge that stigmatisation of their identity. For example, they tended to blame others for their initial entry into show business and highlighted the unhappy experiences they had had as a child. However, one cannot help but wonder that if being a former child star were generally considered to be a wonderful, enviable position to be in that the retrospective stories of what it was 'really' like might not be very different in both selective content and tone. The apologetic nature of the former child stars' self told stories was therefore identified as a technique of protecting their damaged identities due to the strength of the media in characterising them as transgressive

and therefore cursed because of the threat they inadvertently posed to the sanctity of childhood when they were children themselves.

The second data analysis chapter used a broadly structuralist approach to investigate the other side of the child star phenomenon – that of the inherent power of child stars to generate emotion and/or embody hope and futurity. In contrast to the first data analysis chapter which focussed on the culturally specific socially constructed nature of the child star as a symbol of all that is wrong about contemporary childhood, this chapter explored the child star as a manifestation of the powerful wonder-child archetype. Working with Jung's ideas of the universality of the 'child' motif, I found that certain elements of the representations of child stars throughout the twentieth century can be traced back to the religious iconography of the Christ-child. Furthermore, it became apparent that two of the most enduring and desirable attributes of child stars - those of being 'natural' and being 'small yet big'- were also those attributes which have defined child heroes and saviours in the myths and legends of the world. Having demonstrated the connection of the contemporary child star with the universal motif of the redemptive child I went on to explore how the power of the child star also derives from its ambiguous status within our system of meaning. Using Leach's theory of cognitive categorisation I showed how the child star falls between both the categories of childhood and adulthood and the categories of this world and the divine. This 'in-between' status sets the child star apart as sacred and accursed, a duality which is again based on the separateness of this group from the 'normal'. That the categorisation of child stars as abnormal should be the basis both of their power and, as demonstrated in the first data analysis chapter, their powerlessness is a key finding of this research, the implications of which will be discussed later in this piece.

Finally, through an analysis of media stories about Charlotte Church over a period of several years the power of child stars to be symbolic of the tension between innocence and experience which characterises the universal journey into adulthood was explored. I showed how Church was perfect to be used as a metaphor for the struggle between good and evil due to her public transformation from angelic schoolgirl to sexy pop-star. Church's media journey highlighted and reinforced the cultural significance of the child

star to both embody and destroy the sacred image of childhood innocence and this is another key theme of the research which will be expanded upon below.

The use of a dual Methodology for this study enabled me to incorporate both a social constructivist approach to understanding the way the category 'child star' is presently constructed in our culture and a structuralist reading of the data which allowed for an analysis of some of the universal themes and motifs which inform our representations of the child star. Through this inquiry I have been able to demonstrate how the child star derives meaning from both its cultural specificity as a transgressive child and its mythological origins as a signifier of futurity, wholeness and hope. The conflation of the qualities of the 'real' child performer with the image of the child performer on screen or stage has been difficult to avoid throughout the study and it could be argued that the 'wonder-child' archetype is more a feature of the ideal representations of children than of the child stars themselves. However, I think it is this very confusion of the qualities of the real and the ideal which is at the very heart of the meaning of the child star who is from one perspective an embodiment of all that we desire children to be and yet viewed from a different angle is a deviant child who must be punished or pitied. The unique status of the child star emanates not only from its being the site of multiple meanings but also from the way such children are open to fierce public scrutiny and judgement which would not be permitted in relation to the vast majority of children who enjoy the protection and privacy of childhood.

In reference to the initial questions posed in the Introduction then it seems the answers are both straightforward and yet deeply complex. Why do we have child stars? We have them because they represent the divine wonder-child, a symbol of hope and completeness which the human psyche has always had a longing to see manifest in material form. We need them because they are what we can never be again and their 'natural' charm makes us believe in the ultimate goodness of people in their uncorrupted, pre-adult state. Why do we ridicule and denigrate former child stars in the press? Because they grow up and away from the image of perfection and redemption they signified as children. They let us down by becoming just like us; fallible, weak, selfish and flawed, and we feel cheated by their ultimate 'normality'. However, our hostility runs deeper than that as child stars in their

material rather than symbolic form, also challenge the very boundaries of Western childhood which have been so carefully and comprehensively constructed over the last two centuries. As demonstrated through reference to the work of Douglas (1966) the stigmatisation of former child stars as cursed and abnormal freaks is an ancient technique of controlling anomalies in society in order to protect the values and rules of the community. The child star then seems to be caught up in both contemporary politics concerning the homogenisation and definition of childhood and underlying structures of symbolic meaning. I would argue that it is this position of child stars at the intersection of the social and the universal which not only provides the answers to the questions of this research, but also demonstrates the usefulness of considering childhood more generally as determined by social and structural components. This connection of the phenomenon of the child star with wider issues concerning childhood is explored below.

7.2 Childhood and the Child Star

Throughout this study I have indicated the salience of studying the child star in relation to further understanding the complex status of 'childhood' more generally in our society. The following discussion brings together the relevant findings of this research with some of the most prominent issues which currently concern theorists and researchers in the area of childhood studies. I begin by locating the child star within the broader discussion about what the 'child' is.

On closer inspection the duality of meaning of the child star as both a culturally specific construction and a timeless symbol of hope and goodness as identified in this study, is actually another manifestation of the endless debate about the essential nature of the child. In its simplest terms the question boils down to the issue of whether the child is viewed as 'tabula rasa', literally a blank sheet who must be socialised and cultured into the ways of his or her community or whether the child is seen as 'speculae naturae', the mirror of nature who possesses gifts that are lost in the finished product of adulthood. Neustadter (1989) connects this dichotomy of notions about childhood to the social by associating 'tabula rasa' with modernist ideas of rationality and progress and 'speculae naturae' with what he

terms 'anti-modernist' ideals of natural virtue and innocence. He describes the on-going tension between the two positions thus:

These two camps, with sharply conflicting views of childhood, have struggled to impose their definition of children's proper place in society; and have used the image of the child to dramatize and articulate different perspectives on society, progress and social change. (1989:202)

In modernist thought then socialisation mechanisms motivate the child 'to conformity and dissuade him from deviance' from social expectations with the emphasis being on ensuring that the child is adjusted to the 'normal functioning of the social system' (Parsons 1964:212). The overriding aim is for children to reproduce adult roles, norms and responsibilities as they come of age and thus perpetuate the existing social order. Childhood is seen in this way as a period of probation for the adult world. In this light it is clear that child stars go against the grain of modernist conceptions of the functional purpose of childhood because they do not adhere to the conformity of the process of socialisation which has been established to ensure the continuation of the institutions and power relations which define and dominate society. Such individuals have historically been described as being 'counterculture' or belonging to a 'sub-culture' and public attitudes towards them have been divided politically as well as on the basis of age and social class. For example, the 'hippy' movement in America in the 1950s and 60s was built on the idea that remaining in the innocent and creative natural state of childhood was far preferable to the robotic, unthinking 'raw deal' of becoming an adult. The distinction between 'straight' and 'hip' often divided generations and one of the slogans of the movement was not to trust anyone over thirty. As Raymond Mungo observed in his memoirs of the counterculture, leaving childhood for adulthood is not an inherently desirable exchange:

I am never quite free of the forces attempting to make me grow up, sign contracts, get an agent, be a man...I have seen what happens to men. It is curious how helpless, pathetic and cowardly is what adults call a Real Man...If that is manhood, no thank you. (Mungo 1970 quoted in Neustadter 1989:214)

The anti-modernist view of childhood, however, embraces such ideas of childhood as superior to adulthood due to the unfettered thinking and creative spontaneity possessed by children. As Neustadter explains:

Anti-modernist theorists urge that society affirm and accept childhood with all its potentialities. The childhood virtues of spontaneity, purity and innocence must be nurtured and celebrated. Children are the centre of hope. (1989:210)

Within this construct, children are seen as ‘the bearers of tremendously significant tidings’ (ibid :202) and this concept of children as natural wonders is much closer in spirit to the idea of the child star as a powerful symbol of redemption and promise as described in the structuralist chapter of this work.

Neustadter is careful to differentiate the term ‘anti-modern’ from ‘postmodern’ when describing the purely theoretical dichotomy between supporters and opponents of the child as a tool of rational progress and I think he is absolutely right to do so. However, the term ‘postmodern’ is perhaps more appropriate to describe the current status of childhood as a cornucopia of different meanings, values and discourses of which there is no stable referent. As demonstrated in this study, the child can be understood both as a symbol and a lived reality, as a product of the social system or as an ephemeral connection with the divine, as an innocent angel or as a potentially dangerous deviant, as a spectacle to be consumed or as a treasure to be saved. The contradictions and layers of complexity go on and on and one way to understand this is to refer to postmodern theories of the fragmentation of meaning and the free floating nature of signifiers in contemporary culture.

For example, as Baudrillard describes it, within postmodern society the evil demon of images and the precession of simulacra have removed the need for reality and with it the moral order of a society. Reality has been replaced with the hyperreal image of reality which finally bears no relation whatever to the ‘basic reality’ becoming instead ‘its own pure simulacrum.’ Baudrillard therefore describes images as ‘murderers of the real’ (1983:10) and laments the loss of truth and God which such a substance-less existence provides us with.

In relation to children this moral panic over the rise of the image over reality can be associated with concerns over the commercialisation of both visual representations of the child and of childhood itself. Kline (1995) has drawn attention to the way in which children are now globally constructed as a consumer group by multi-national organisations and subject to the processes which universalise human needs as merely a 'fetishism of use-value' thereby degrading childhood to the level of yet another marketing classification. As such the images of the 'child' which proliferate in our media culture have as little to do with 'real' children as the commercially defined category of 'childhood' has to do with the lived experience of being a child. Kline describes the increasing targeting of children by global promotional communication as due to the rise of children's industries, international strategies of marketing and the deregulation of cultural industries. Protestors who voice fears over the death of childhood as a time of innocence and separateness from the adult world of commerce have to compete with the multi billion dollar industry which trades in children's toys and games as well as food and drink manufacturers, who are hell bent on establishing brand loyalty with a new generation of consumers regardless of the so-called 'sanctity of childhood'.

When we consider that child stars represent the ultimate in the commercialisation of childhood whereby they are actually children who have a market value and who are products to be bought, sold and consumed according to the dictates of an industry, it becomes a little clearer as to why they can be targets for such vilification in our society at the present time. Not only do they ignore the normative standard that children should be economically inactive dependants rather than workers, but they are also a part of the commercialised world of unbounded entertainment, advertising and marketing associated with the corruption and decimation of 'childhood' more generally. Clearly child stars upset the idealised image of childhood by being paid for their services whilst at the same time portraying beings whose goodness places them above the petty adult spheres of money and narcissistic ambition. There is also the discomfiting fact that, despite trust funds and declarations of selflessness, it is inescapable that the parents of child stars make a profit out of the labour of their child – a practice which has become almost completely unacceptable in Western society over the last hundred years.

Zelitzer (1981) explored this complex relationship between the human and market values of children in her seminal study on the case of children's insurance in the US in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She describes the emergence of the economically 'worthless' but emotionally 'priceless' child as a product of a growing sacralisation of children's lives over this period which began in middle-class families and gradually trickled down into the labouring classes as children were removed from the world of work and re-located in schools. This establishment of childhood as a non-productive time became associated with a new moral imperative to protect and value children which has persisted in our conception of child labour ever since whereby the shared consensus is now that 'the concept of making money out of the life or death of a child seems mercenary and morally repugnant to most people.' (Zelitzer 1981:1036). The practice of insuring children therefore became unsavoury and Zelitzer quotes Felix Adler as early as 1905, declaring that to make profit out of children was to 'touch profanely a sacred thing' (1981:1039). However, even in those days of emerging enlightenment and social progress, the child star was seen as a separate issue, for some reason never quite being entitled to the sanctified status enjoyed by other children. Zelitzer notes that by the 1920s:

It was recognised that only in exceptional cases, such as child actors (Shirley Temple, for example, was insured for \$600,000 at the age of nine in 1936) did parents lose money when they lost a child. (Zelitzer 1981:1051)

Exactly why making money from child performers is considered acceptable even today, when for the last century making a profit from children has been viewed with increasing distaste is one of the 'taken for granted' facts of social life which this study has aimed to unravel. I have demonstrated through this research that the way in which child stars are constructed as different from 'normal' children due to their innate 'specialness' and/or 'deviant' childhood experiences sets them apart from the received consensus on how children should be treated and justifies their exclusion from the usual protections and privileges that Western childhood offers. By separating child stars from other children both conceptually and materially (they are educated on set, they receive a wage and so-on) such

individuals become simply images or simulacra of real children and as such are denied full personhood in the social world.

This distancing of certain children from 'normal' children in order to avoid having to treat them as fully human is explored by Giroux (1998) in relation to the odd spectacle of child beauty pageants which have been proliferating in America for the last twenty years. He describes the practice of dressing up little girls and parading them on stage in full make-up as emblematic of the phenomenon of the 'disappearing child' whereby the 'real' child is replaced with a fantasy image of the 'child' which, 'allows adults to believe that children do not suffer from their greed, recklessness, perversions of will and spirit, and that they are, in the final analysis, unaccountable.' (Giroux 1998:31)

The stratagem of imbuing such juvenile beauty queens, as well as child stars, with lashings of adorable 'childhood innocence' also works to feed the fantasy that the child is a repository of all the goodness and potential that the adult world lacks. Ironically though, this innocence can also be interpreted as highly erotic in its mysteriousness thus perpetuating the sexualisation and commodification of young girls who are, in child beauty pageants and similar practices, being taught to identify themselves through the 'pleasures and desires of the adult gaze'. As Goldstein notes:

Only in a culture that represses the evidence of the senses could child pageantry grow into a \$5 billion dollar industry without anyone noticing. Only in a nation of promiscuous puritans could it be a good career move to equip a six-year-old with bedroom eyes. (Goldstein 1997 quoted in Giroux 1998:31)

The separation of issues of child abuse and paedophilia from the cultural practices which encourage such sexualisation of young children is identified by Giroux as a false one, and he views child beauty pageants as upheld by commercial and ideological structures within the broader society such as fashion photography and advertising. Giroux quotes from an article in the *New York Times* which voices the importance of recognising the complicit part we all play in reifying and objectifying children by demanding particular representations of them in the media:

the strange world of kids' pageantry is not a 'subculture' – it's our culture. But as long as we call it a subculture, it can remain a problem for somebody else. (Frank Rich 1997 quoted in Giroux 1998:38)

A similar sentiment could be applied to child stars who have long been denied access to the protection and privacy afforded other children and whose bodies are treated like a commodity. By placing the blame for any negative experiences or uncomfortable imagery squarely with the child performers themselves or with their 'greedy' parents, the media absolves the consuming public of any guilt in the avidly reported 'downfalls' of former child stars. The hypocrisy of a society which demands idealised visions of childhood and then demonises the 'real' people behind the image can surely only exist in a culture which values children for their future potential and yet does not want them to grow up.

Indeed, worries about the precocious sexuality of children, especially little girls, seems to be part of a more generalised anxiety about the consequences of children growing up too soon in our society. Children who appear in child beauty pageants and those who perform professionally on screen are tangible, visible manifestations of these concerns and therefore debates around their welfare often centre on such issues, even though it is adult desire which has fashioned their images and positioned them in the public gaze. The fear of children growing up too soon is frequently related to the changing dynamic between children and the media, whereby popular cultural sites;

position children in terms of how they are taught to think of themselves through the images, values and discourses offered to them. (Giroux 1998:48)

For example, the way young girls learn to perceive themselves through the commercial appropriation of childhood femininity is explored by Russell and Tyler (2002) in their critical analysis of a chain of UK retail outlets called 'Girl Heaven'. These shops sell cosmetics, accessories, jewellery and other, what would generally be considered to be high-camp paraphernalia such as feather boas, and also offer popular make-over sessions to groups of little girls who are bedecked with feminine accoutrements and make-up. Russell and Tyler draw attention to the way in which such overtly gendered consumerism instil in

young girls the idea that they should be body conscious and that they should analyse their bodies and identify ways in which they deviate from the ideal – facets of womanhood which are specifically aligned with increasing sexual attractiveness and awareness.

Given such concerns that the institutions and practices around childhood both encourage little girls to be reflexive about their appearance and to ape adult femininity, the adult preference for child stars who appear to embody ‘natural’ qualities of childhood becomes clear – ‘normal’ adults do not want children to be precociously mature or sexualised and nor do they wish to see representations of children as such.

However, it is interesting that the success of stores such as ‘Girl Heaven’ and the obvious enjoyment many young girls derive from dressing up in adult style clothes and copying pop stars and celebrities indicate that perhaps children themselves do not prize their own ‘naturalness’ and ‘innocence’ over all other attributes. This omission of the child’s point of view in debate over children ‘growing up too quickly’ can be understood as an example of the disparity between the notion of the child as an object of concern and that of the child as subject of their own self-representation. If we accept that adults always know what is best for children and that children should not, for example, leave childhood before it is deemed age appropriate for them to do so, then the child becomes simply an object of adult control rather than a subject of his or her own agency. It also begs the question of what it is that we as adults are basing the decisions we make for and about children on. As demonstrated through the work of Giroux and the present study, some of the dominant elements of contemporary Western childhood are derived from the most whimsical ideas.

Castaneda (2002) in her reflection on the status of the ‘child’ in post-structuralist theory explains the failure to establish a satisfactory theory of the child-subject as due to the way in which the ‘child’ has been established through definitions of what it is not in relation to adulthood, thereby divesting the child of any ‘specific materiality’. She explains the problem thus; ‘It is difficult at this stage to imagine how a theory of the child-subject might proceed,’ because the child is not only inadequately represented in theory, but also because the child is, ‘everywhere in representation (on Benetton’s billboards, on television

shows, in the news) but almost nowhere in public self-representation.’ (Castaneda 2002:294)

That the figure of the ‘child’ replaces the child in public life, culture and social theory is nowhere more evident than in the case of the child star. Indeed, given Kincaid’s (1992) radical constructivism which suggests that society and culture have constructed the child as something of an ‘alien species’, it seems possible that all children are now conceptualised as nothing more or less than child stars. As previously noted, he claims that the child:

is not, in itself, anything but a cultural formation and an object of adult desire, a function necessary to our psychic and cultural life. (Kincaid 1992:5)

The fundamental reason for this theoretical and material neglect of the child as a self-actualised individual has often been identified as the unavoidably unequal power relations between adults and children. For example, Butler (1997) describes the disparity as due to the incontrovertible dependence of the infant:

The primary passion born of total dependence makes the child vulnerable to subordination and exploitation. It lays the ground for the subject’s future as on-going subjection to power. (Butler in Castaneda 2002:156)

Hockey and James (1993) relate the powerlessness of children to other ‘monolithic and culturally specific categories’ such as ‘the disabled’ and ‘the elderly’ which ‘work as stereotypes to gloss over and homogenise the wide diversity of social experience which belongs to those assigned membership of such categories.’ (1993:47). They explain that it is in the interests of those with power (namely able-bodied, financially independent adults) to perpetuate such categories in order to justify unequal power relations which are operative within the life course between those who are ‘without full personhood and those in possession of it.’ (1993:47).

The powerlessness of children to control either their status in society or the symbolic value of their image has been demonstrated in this research in relation to media constructions of

child stars and former child stars as stigmatised and pitiful individuals. That this negative construction is due to wider fears about the 'death' of childhood and children growing up and away from adult control too quickly reflects the way in which the child star has a cultural significance or 'currency' to be used to represent wider concerns. Other studies have also reported this malleability of the image of certain groups of children to firstly be constructed as a group, and then be presented in the media in particular ways in order to reinforce socially held beliefs about childhood and other issues.

For example, Seale (2004) analysed media representations of childhood cancer and noted how such children are used as symbols of innocence and victimhood in contrast to villainous hospital bureaucrats. The stories he analysed emphasised a preferred reading of childhood as a time of innocent enjoyment whereby children are entitled to, among other things, toys, presents, love, education and a promising future, all of which cancer threatens to remove. Interestingly, just as in media constructions of child stars, children with cancer are often represented as 'special' and exceptional. Recurrent themes of the struggle between life and death and good and evil are also evident in these narratives, along with fairy tale style characterisations of patients, doctors, social workers and parents as heroes, fools, villains or bunglers. Seale notes that the opportunity such stories provide to idealise a certain version of childhood, create drama and also reinforce high expectations of health care availability mean that the child's 'real' story is largely irrelevant to the journalistic aims of the genre:

Whether children with cancer live or die, however it seems that they are all special characters, with unusual levels of insight, cheerfulness, courage or altruism. Rarely do children with cancer speak for themselves or express distress at any length. This absence allows generous scope for idealised descriptions of child heroism. (Seale 2004:113)

This erasure of subjectivity in reports of children has been noted in other areas of the media such as charitable aid campaigns (Burman 1999) and in the social construction of street children (de Moura 2002).

Indeed, de Moura's analysis of the discourses surrounding street children in Brazil draws attention to many of the issues which were identified in this study on child stars. For example, street children are seen to epitomise a wider decline in family values and a breakdown in moral values in society. They are presented as being outside mainstream society and forever stigmatised because of their failure to have a 'normal' childhood, and their lives and experiences are held up as spectacles to be judged by the worried, or perhaps simply fascinated, public:

Every aspect of their lives is exposed to the public gaze and appraisal, and their appearance, life conditions and behaviours arouse pity, disgust, horror and disapproval among spectators. (de Moura 2002:353)

Furthermore, just as child stars are seen as both victims of adult exploitation and evil wrongdoers and transgressors of childhood themselves, so street children are caught in this duality of being constructed as both innocent and deviant:

Although street children are presented as the victims of poverty and malevolent adults, they also display undesirable behaviour; sexual promiscuity, prostitution, use of drugs and criminal acts. In the name of generalisation and the search for the real, poor families are represented as a breeding ground for moral corruption and street children as lacking any ethical awareness of the civilised world. (ibid:361)

The consequences of media constructions of childhood are, it seems, wide and insidious and it is hoped that the current study will be a contribution to the body of work which aims to draw attention to and challenge dominant narratives which create certain subject positions for children from which it is almost impossible for the individual to escape.

That this research has also highlighted the power of the image and the idea of the child star however is an important adjunct to the disempowering constructions of most children who fall outside acceptable social boundaries of 'normal' childhoods. By drawing attention to the deeper mythical and archetypal influences which give meaning to the child star beyond the confines of our temporally and culturally specific boundaries I hope to have made clear the limitations of a purely social constructivist analysis in fully accounting for this, and potentially many other, aspects of childhood.

This study has found that child stars are unusual in deriving both power and powerlessness from their status as being different from ‘normal’ children. This ambiguity, along with the unique relationship child stars have with the media in being both commercialised cultural products and contributors to idealised notions and images of childhood, render them important figures in our on-going deconstruction of childhood.

As demonstrated in the above discussion, the complexity of discourses surrounding the child star reflects the complexity of discourses around children in general in contemporary society, particularly in relation to fears about the increasing commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood. Constantly drawing attention to the inconsistent and contradictory messages about children which bombard us every day through the media is one way in which subtle shifts in public attitudes and stereotypical injustices can be identified, and the disparity between media representation and lived experience can be made explicit. Without such awareness of how the media constructs and frames each and every one of us due to our own social and cultural characteristics it is all too easy to fall into the trap of ‘common sense’ acceptance of the seemingly innocuous normalisations which work to subjectify, contain and ultimately to control.

The next section appraises the Methodology employed in this study and evaluates the research in relation to the four tenets of validity which were set out in an earlier chapter.

7.3 Appraisal of Methodology and Validity of the Study

Silverman (1985) highlighted the necessity of adopting methods of study which are appropriate to the data at hand, and this was a central consideration when designing the Methodology for this work. Given the diverse and rich nature of the texts and images I wanted to analyse, a mixed Methodology encompassing both discourse analysis and a structuralist reading of the data-set was deemed to be the most appropriate. This dual approach allowed me to do the following three things: Firstly, I was able to deconstruct the phenomenon of the child star and explore the discourses which inform our current understanding of the category. Secondly, I was able to incorporate a deeper level of

analysis by conceptualising the child star as a recurring symbol of hope and fulfilment thereby creating a fuller picture of the contradictory and complex status of the child star in our society. Finally, this dual methodology enabled me to highlight the limitations of a purely social constructivist approach in understanding the cultural significance of specific groups of children and certain preferred versions of childhood.

I noted in the Methodology the difficulties inherent in establishing the validity of qualitative studies and set up four criteria on which I would assess the verisimilitude of this research. These criteria were; coherence, persuasiveness, correspondence and fruitfulness, and the extent to which the study achieved each is discussed below.

Coherence

This criterion recommends that analysis should give coherence to a body of discourse and should show how different elements fit together and produce effects and functions.

With this in mind, the analysis in this study accounted for both broad patterns and micro-sequences which occurred in the data. I did this by including items from a variety of broad sheet and tabloid, local and national newspapers as well as articles and pictures from a wide variety of magazines, books and websites which included different styles of stories about child stars with different focuses and content. By incorporating as much textual information as possible I was able to both establish the dominant constructions of the child star and to identify deviations from the standard and explain them in relation to the central analytic themes. For example, it was found that stories about child stars in local newspapers are much warmer and congratulatory in tone than in national newspapers. Rather than omitting such stories from the data-set this anomaly was incorporated into the analysis and explained as being due to issues of control. Whereby local child stars who have yet to reach the 'big time' are still seen as unthreatening, 'normal' children under parental and social control and still living and going to school in their local community, more successful child stars are viewed as being outside these parameters of 'normality' and in a dangerous free-floating boundary-less world beyond such secure governance. That it is this issue of child stars being outside traditional boundaries of existence and control which

causes hostility towards them rather than the content of their actual performances was an important finding of the study and contributed to the understanding of the selectivity of the media created 'curse' of the child star. In this way, the themes and hypotheses of the research were continually being assessed and modified in light of the data in order to develop a theoretical schema which accounted for the wide range of instances in the data-set.

Persuasiveness

The criterion of persuasiveness asks the question of whether the interpretation of the data is reasonable and convincing.

In order to maximise persuasiveness, great care has been taken throughout this study to provide a range of textual examples to support theoretical statements and to describe the process of analytic thinking which has led to theoretical claims. As with all research of this nature, more than one reading of the data is possible, indeed there are multitude ways in which the data could have been analysed according to the interests and aims of the researcher. However, I am satisfied that my interpretation is reasonable and convincing because I have generated my theory both from the data and from the findings of a variety of previous research and I have adapted and refined my thinking about the subject as the study progressed. The fact that I included two different readings of the data, one through an analysis of discourse, the other through an examination of structural elements, demonstrates my commitment to ensuring that my account is comprehensive and persuasive. Ultimately, to have analysed the data only from one or other of these perspectives would not have produced a satisfactory documentation of the subject and, in my opinion, could not be presented as a persuasive piece of work.

Correspondence

The main objective of achieving correspondence is that an investigator can take results back to the original or similar data and come up with the same conclusions.

As noted above, the subjective nature of qualitative research makes any one reading of a data-set only one of a range of potential readings. The fact that researchers bring their own judgements, experience and knowledge to data analysis, as well as their own subject positions according to gender, age, ethnicity and so-on means that the aim of true correspondence in a scientific sense is not possible in this context. However, by including extensive textual data and reproductions of images from which my analysis is drawn and by carefully detailing my Methodology it is hoped that the conclusions I have reached correspond logically to the journey I have taken with the data.

Fruitfulness

The criterion of fruitfulness is described by Potter and Wetherell as:

the scope of an analytic scheme to make sense of new kinds of discourses and to generate novel explanations. (1987:171)

In my opinion, the current study is fruitful in the following ways:

1. It draws attention to the significance of child stars as a phenomenon worthy of study both in their own right and for what they can tell us about the status of childhood more generally in our culture.
2. It demonstrates the usefulness of employing a methodology which incorporates socially constructed and structural levels of analysis in order to encompass the complexity of certain elements of childhood and open up fresh avenues of explanation.
3. The findings of this study in relation to the dual construction of child stars as powerful and powerless may be a useful theoretical starting point for further research into other specific groups of children who fall outside the 'normal' parameters of childhood.

4. The narrative techniques of subjectification identified in the media construction of the child star could be used as a prototype for exploring how other minority groups, be they children or adults, whose experiences render them outside the 'normal' in our society are stigmatised through our everyday cultural practices.
5. The techniques of justification, rationalisation and explanation utilised by former child stars in their attempts to reconstruct an 'authentic' persona for themselves could be used as a reference for further studies which aim to investigate how dominant definitions of childhood impact on the identity construction of those whose experiences fall outside the 'normal' parameters of childhood in their culture.

Overall it is hoped that this study has highlighted the social, cultural and ideological significance of child stars and that I have shown the potential enrichment that the inclusion of some of childhood's outsiders can contribute to our overall understanding of how childhood works in our society. No one study, however, can encompass every element of a research subject and suggestions for potential further studies are outlined below.

7.4 Potential Future Research

One particularly interesting line of enquiry for future research generated from this study would be an investigation of the agency of child stars in being instrumental in their own success. This study has touched on the pleasures derived by child stars from performing in front of an audience or being part of the 'family' of a film or television set and I think this is an important element of the story of the child star which also needs to be told. As demonstrated in this research, traditional accounts of child stardom have focussed on the exploitation of such children by their parents and other parties with vested financial interests and thus the notion of the child star as powerless, voiceless and lacking all agency and control has been established.

However, the fact that many youngsters are excited about the prospect of performing in front of an audience or having the special attention that being in the spotlight brings suggests that children themselves may well be more of a dynamic force behind early

stardom than retrospective autobiographical accounts and interviews would imply. Indeed, the proliferation in contemporary popular culture of reality television programmes and talent shows all contribute to the growing belief that everyone can have their fifteen minutes of fame and that being on television for any reason is an experience to aspire to. In such a celebrity and performance obsessed era is it any wonder that children want to be part of it? In a media driven society which values style over substance, looks over personality and spectacle over content why would we expect children not to desire to have their chance to shine in the gloss of celebrity culture? Legendary pushy parents aside, it seems possible that in many cases child stars have become prominent and successful because they wanted to perform and seize the opportunity to be 'someone'. By conceptualising them solely as 'victims' of adult exploitation a dimension of child stardom is lost and the child is further removed from the agency of his or her own life experiences.

This study has attempted to redress the narrow definition of the child star as deviant and cursed by deconstructing the reasons behind the way they are framed and presented in certain ways in the media, but to achieve this it has been necessary to conceptualise the child star as largely an abstract socially defined category. By describing the child star as a symbolic site of the conflicts between innocence and experience, good and evil and childhood and adulthood the category has been identified as culturally significant and we, the audience, have been implicated for the part we play in demanding idealised images of childhood in the form of child stars and then casting them as deviant when they no longer fulfil their original purpose. The child star has frequently therefore been treated in this research as an object of investigation, held at a distance in order to see clearly how the category works in relation to the wider discourses and media practices which position it.

Investigating the child star's point of view in a further study, perhaps through interviews or ethnomethodological studies of children involved in performances, would be an important adjunct to the current study which focuses on the construction of the 'child star' as a social category rather than on the motivations and pleasures of being, or aspiring to be, a child star.

Another further avenue of inquiry would be to investigate the degree of generalisability of the findings of this study to the social construction of other groups of exceptional children. Differences in the tone and attitude of media stories about children who have achieved beyond expectations in areas such as sport or mathematics rather than in acting or singing have been mentioned in this study and provide an intriguing contrast to the classic image of the cursed child star. The extent to which the field of endeavour seems to define the extent of the stigmatisation of early achievers suggests that there is something specifically objectionable about children who have excelled in certain fields (i.e. singing and acting) and not others. This differentiation again brings up the issue of the association of child stars with precocious sexuality and ‘unnatural’ commercialisation which is perhaps not part of the image of other exceptional youngsters. How strong elements of the ‘wonder-child’ archetype are in the constructions of other early achievers is another important question. Do they also derive power from their differentness to other children or are they viewed as less remarkable than their starlet counterparts and thus somehow still part of the world of children?

7.5 Conclusion

The child star has been demonstrated in this study to be the product of many different meanings, interpretations and historical antecedents. My attempt to define, describe and explain this social group has produced an account of child stars which encompasses both their cultural specificity and their universality and which has challenged popular accounts which simply pathologise child stars and their parents.

However, in the final analysis the child star will always remain somewhat elusive and hard to define and perhaps this is as it should be. Why certain children ‘make it’ and others don’t, what it is about particular individuals that enables them to elicit emotion in an audience and how some children come to represent the ideals of childhood through their performances are all questions which are difficult, if not impossible, to answer.

As Donald explains, regardless of the analytic techniques used there are inherent limitations in truly understanding what it is about certain individuals, be they six or sixty, whose images have the profound power to fascinate us and hold our attention in the visual media:

The circulation, reception and cultural currency of stars cannot be explained convincingly by exclusively textual, sociological or economic forms of analysis...stars have a currency which runs beyond the institution of cinema. They require an analysis capable of explaining the resilience of these images which we pay to have haunt our minds. (Donald 1985:50)

Moreover, the resilience of the child star to be an enduring figure in a society which has supposedly moved on from reductionist ideas of children as objects of adult manipulation is the biggest mystery of all. The cultural significance of the child star surely resides in this paradox.

APPENDIX I

Images of Child Stars

**TEXT BOUND
INTO
THE SPINE**



Fig. 1.1 Shirley Temple 1934 (*Twentieth Century Fox*) source www.classicphotos.com

TEXT
CHRIS HEATH
PHOTOGRAPHY
TERRY RICHARDSON



Fig 1.2



Fig 1.3

I was
sitting around
saying, "Oh a
Harry Potter
because the
will break
that shit
star image"



Fig 1.4

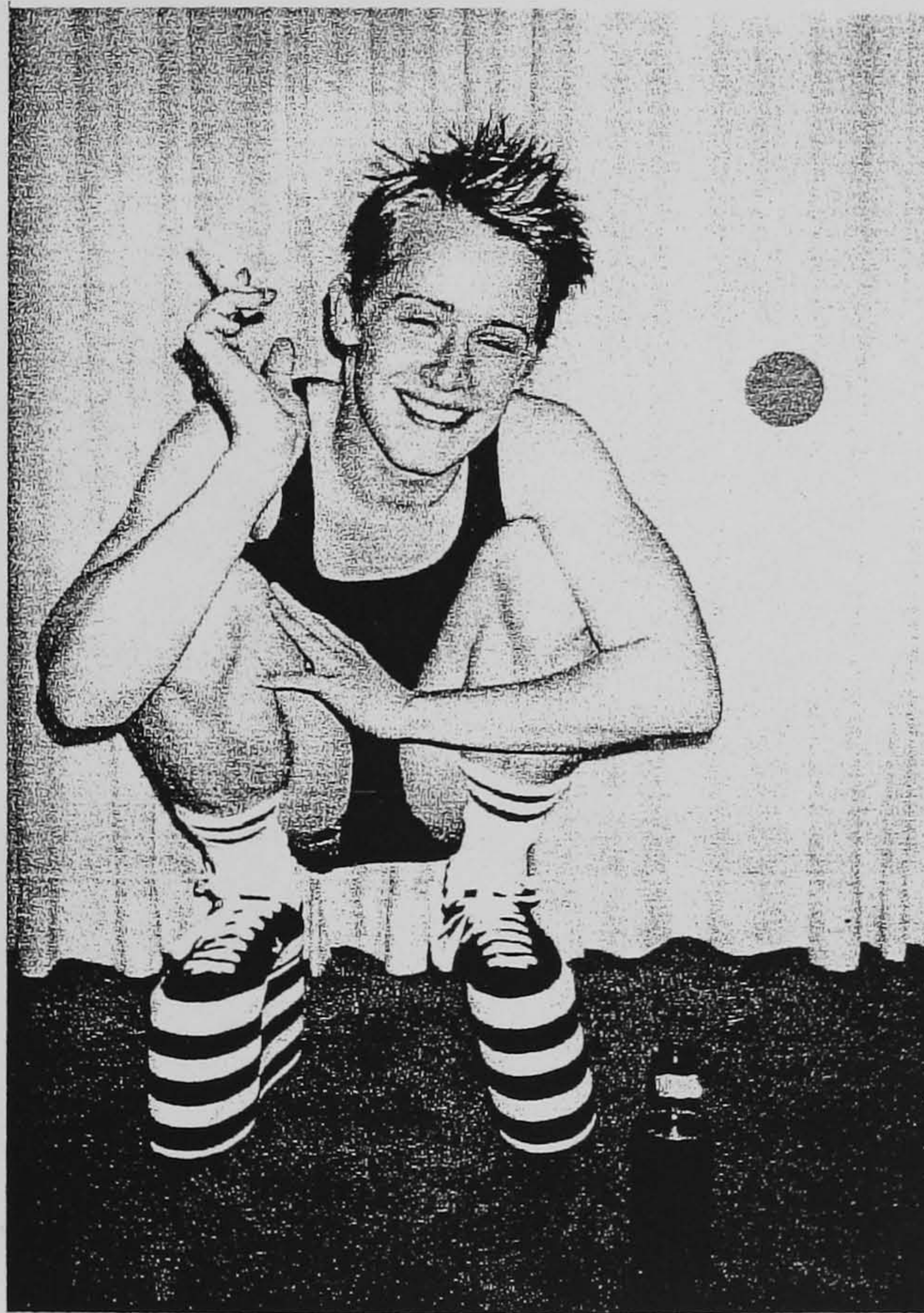


Fig 1.5

(Figs 1.2 – 1.5 from Macaulay Culkin feature in *The Face Magazine* November 2002)

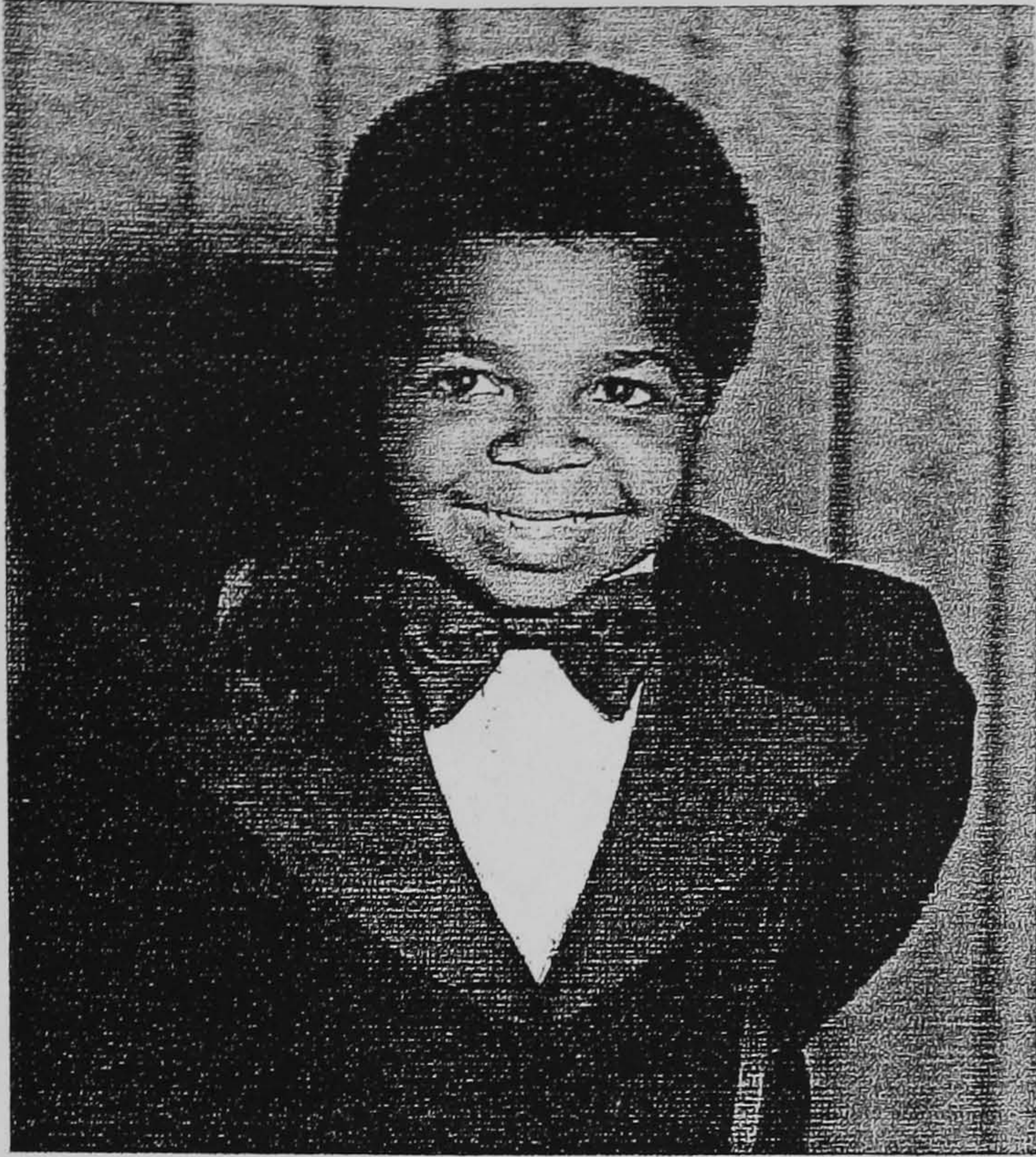


Fig 1.6 Gary Coleman in 1980



Fig 1.7 Gary Coleman in 2000 at the 72nd Annual Academy Awards

(Figs 1.6 and 1.7 published in Ryan 2000)

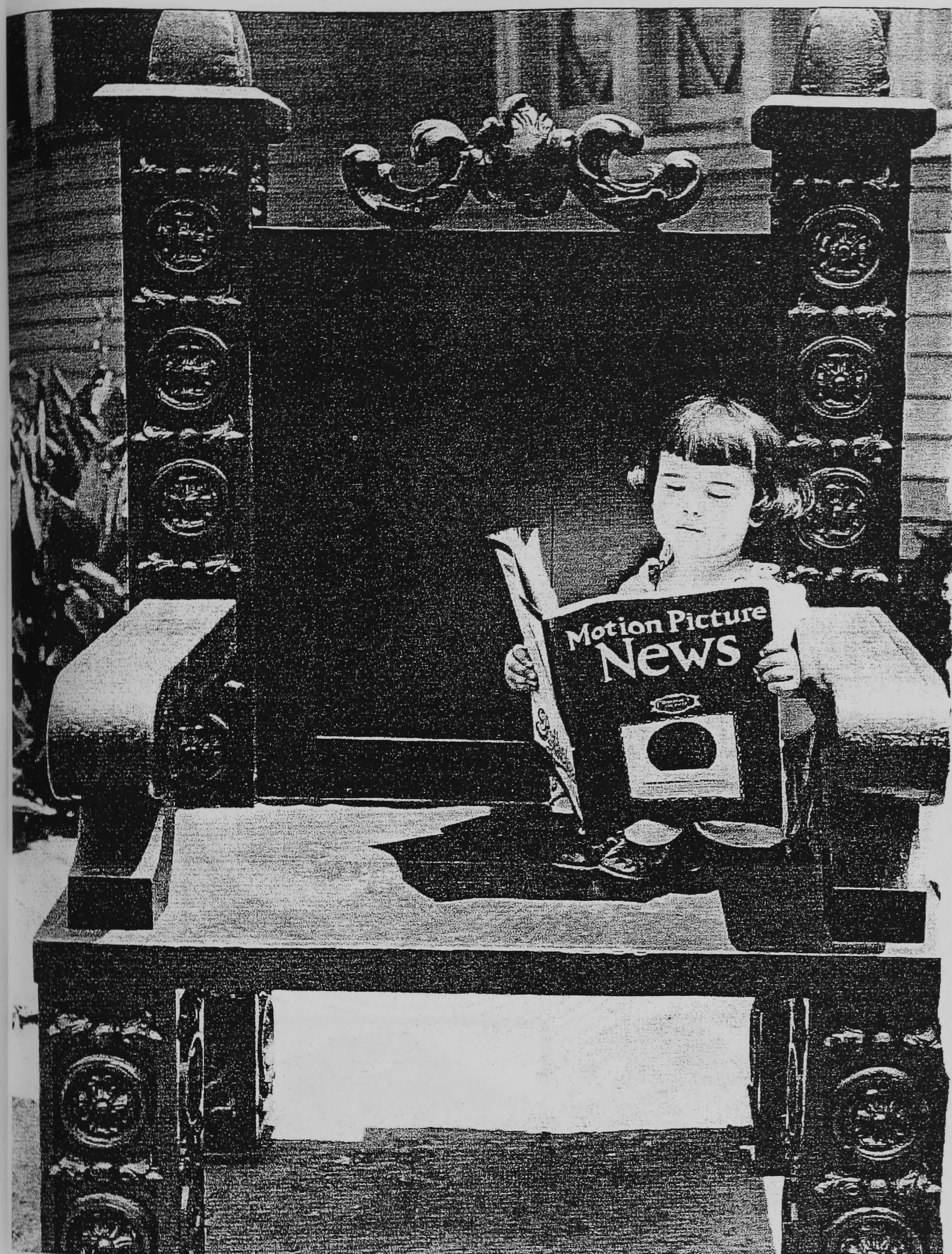


Fig 1.8 Baby Peggy (Diana Serra Cary) 1921 published in Darvi 1983



SHIRLEY TEMPLE is cute any way you take her. The photographer told her to be a good little girl, so she looked angelic. But she can, just as delightfully, pout or play at the art of the coquette (they're never too young!). Shirley willingly posed at the studio, but when the cameraman came into her garden, interrupting her romp that wasn't so nice. As for leaving pictures taken at bedtime, Shirley just yawned at that

Fig 2.0 Shirley Temple montage from Photoplay Magazine Treasury August 1934



Church triumphant:
I'd really like to sing
Madama Butterfly,
or Mimi or Tosca
at La Scala and get a
standing ovation!

Fig 2.1 Charlotte Church hugs a bear and muses on the future



Angel in the charts

Fig 2.2 Charlotte Church depicted as an angel child

(Figs 2.1 and 2.2 from *CLASSICALMUSIC* magazine 19.12.98)



Fig 2.3 Cartoon of Charlotte Church in church (Daily Star 16.12.04)



Fig 2.4 Picture accompanying headline of "Charlotte the Drug Diva" (The Mail on Sunday 11.09.05)



Fig 2.5 Before and after pictures of a big night out for Charlotte Church (new! Ma 19.09.05

Bibliography

Adams, K. (1988) Your Child Can Be a Genius – And Happy! Wellingborough: Thorsons.

Alanen, L. (2000) 'Review Essay: Visions of a social theory of childhood' in *Childhood* Vol. 7(4) pp493-505.

Alexander, P.A. (1985) 'Gifted and nongifted students' perceptions of intelligence' in *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 29, 137-43.

Agar, B. and Hobbs, J.R. (1982) 'Interpreting discourse: Coherence and the analysis of ethnographic interviews' in *Discourse Processes*, 5, 1-32.

Archard, D. (1993) Children: Rights and Childhood, London: Routledge.

Ariès, P. (1962) Centuries of Childhood, London: Jonathan Cape.

Bamberger, J. (1982) 'Growing up prodigies: the mid-life crisis' *New Directions for Child Development*, 17, 61-78.

Barry, W. (1999) Growing Up Brady: I Was a Teenage Greg, New York: HarperPerennial.

Barrymore, D. (1991) Little Girl Lost, New York: Pocket Books.

Barthés, R. (1972) Mythologies, London: Fontana.

Baudrillard, J. (1983) Simulations, New York: Semiotext(e) Inc.

Baudrillard, J. (1987) The Evil Demon of Images, Sydney: The Power Institute of Fine Arts.

Bel Geddes, B. (1997) Childhood and Children Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.

Benedict, R. (1938) 'Continuities and Discontinuities in Cultural Conditioning' in M. Mead and M. Wolfenstein (eds) (1954) Childhood in Contemporary Cultures , London: Phoenix Books.

Bonaduce, D. (1991) 'My Life as a Has-Been' in *Esquire Magazine*, August 1991.

Bowlby, J. (1953) Child Care and the Growth of Love, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Buckingham, D. (1987) Children and Television: An Overview of the Research, British Film Institute, mimeo.

Buckingham, D. (1993) Children Talking Television: The Making of Television Literacy, London: Falmer.

Buckingham, D. (1999) Children's Television in Britain: History, Discourse and Policy, British Film Institute Publishing.

Burchill, J. (1986) Girls on Film, London: Virgin.

Burman, E (1994) Deconstructing Developmental Psychology, London: Routledge.

Burman, E (1999) 'Appealing and appalling children' *Psychoanalytic Studies* Vol 1 No.3 pp285-301.

Burt, C. (1935) The Subnormal Mind, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Butler, J.** (1997) The Psychic Life of Power, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Campbell, J.** (1962) Oriental Mythology: The Masks of God, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Campbell, J.** (1993) The Hero with a Thousand Faces, London: Fontana.
- Cary, D.S.** (1997) Hollywood's Children: An Inside Account of the Child Star Era', Southern Methodist University Press: Dallas.
- Castaneda, C** (2002) Figurations: child, bodies, worlds, London: Duke University Press.
- Cattell, R.B.** (1936) A Guide to Mental Testing for Psychological Clinics, Schools and Industrial Psychologists, London: University of London Press.
- Chaney, D.** (1979) Fictions and Ceremonies: Representations of Popular Experience, New York: St.Martin's Press.
- Chase, R.** (1949) Quest for Myth, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press.
- Coleman, G.** (1981) Gary Coleman: Medical Miracle. Coward, McCann and Goeghegan.
- Cook, P.** (ed) (1985) The Cinema Book, London: BFI.
- Corsaro, W.** (1997) The Sociology of Childhood Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Coveney, P.** (1967) The Image of Childhood, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Culler, J.** (1981) The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature and Deconstruction, London: Routledge.

Cunningham, H. (1995) Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500, Harlow: Longman.

Darvi, A. (1983) Pretty Babies: An Insider's Look at the World of the Hollywood Child Star, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

DeMause, L. (1976) The History of Childhood, London: Souvenir.

De Moura, S.L. (2002) 'The Social Construction of Street Children; Configuration and Implications' *British Journal of Social Work* Vol 32 pp353-367.

Dickens, C. [1838-39] (1999) Nicholas Nickleby, London: Penguin Books.

Donald, J. (1985) 'Stars' in P. Cook (ed) The Cinema Book, London: BFI.

Douglas, M. [1966] (1984) Purity and Danger, London: Ark Paperbacks.

Eagleton, T. (1996) The Function of Criticism, London: Verso.

Edelman, S. (2002) No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive, London: Duke University Press.

Edwards, A. (1975) Judy Garland, Constable and Company: London.

Elkind, D. (2001) The Hurried Child: Growing up too Fast too Soon, Da Capo Press.

Ellis, J. (1982) Visible Fictions, London: Routledge.

Eysenck, H. (1953) Uses and Abuses of Psychology, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Feldman, D.H. (1986) Nature's Gambit: Child Prodigies and the development of human potential. NY: Basic Books.

Foucault, M. (1961) Madness and Civilization, London: Tavistock.

Foucault, M. [1969] (2002) The Archaeology of Knowledge, London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1977) Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, London: Allen Lane.

Foucault, M. (1979) The History of Sexuality Vol 1: An Introduction, London: Allen Lane.

Friedberg, E. (1982) 'Identification and the Star' in C. Gledhill (ed) Star Signs, London: BFI Education.

Gallagher, J.M. and Sigel, I.E. (1987) 'Hothousing: The clinical and educational concerns over pressurizing young children,' *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 2, 203-10.

Galton, F. [1867] (2004) Hereditary Genius, New York: Kessinger Publishing.

Garrett, H. (1955) General Psychology, New York: American Book Company.

Geldman, B. (ed) (1972) Photoplay Treasury, New York: Crown Publishers Inc.

Gessell, A. (1946) The Mental Growth of the Pre-School Child, New York: Macmillan.

Giroux, H.A. (1998) 'Child Beauty Pageants and the Politics of Innocence,' *Social Text* 57, Vol 16, No 4, Winter 1998.

Glaser, B. and Strauss, A. L. (1968) The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Glauser, B. (1990) 'Street Children: Deconstructing a Construct' in A. James and A. Prout (eds) Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood, London: The Falmer Press.

Goffman, E. [1963] (1990) Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity, London: Penguin.

Goldstein, R. (1997) 'The Girl in the Bubble: The Mystery of Jon-Benet,' in *Village Voice*, 10 June 1997 p41.

Griffiths, E. (1997) 'Child Actors on the Fifth Century Stage: A Director's View' (Paper delivered at conference on the ancient stage, Saskatoon Canada 22-25 October 1997)

Grinder, R.E.(1985) 'The gifted in our midst: By their divine deeds, neuroses, and mental test scores we have known them.' In M.O'Brien The Gifted and Talented: developmental perspectives. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

Hall, S. (1980) 'Encoding/decoding', in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, London: Hutchinson, pp. 128-38.

Hamilton, D.L., & Trolie, T.K. (1986). 'Stereotypes and stereotyping: An overview of the cognitive approach.' in J. Dovidio, & S. Gaertner (eds.), Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism, Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Hawks, T. (1992) Structuralism and Semiotics, London: Routledge.

Hendrick, H. (1990) 'Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood: An Interpretative Survey, 1800 to the Present' in A. James and A. Prout (eds) Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood, London: The Falmer Press.

Higonnet, A. (1998) Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.

Hockey, J. and James, A. (1993) Growing Up and Growing Old: Ageing and Dependency in the Life Course, London: Sage.

Hollingdale, R.J. (ed & trans) (1977) A Nietzsche Reader, London: Penguin.

Holt, J. (1971) Escape from Childhood, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Hogan, D. (1997) Dark Romance: Sexuality in the Horror Film, North Carolina: McFarland & Co.

Howe, H. (1923) 'What's Going to Happen to Jackie Coogan?' Photoplay Magazine, December 1923.

Howe, M.J.A. (1988) 'Is it true that everyone's child can be a genius?' *The Psychologist*, 1, 356-8.

Hoyles (1979) Changing Childhood, Writers' & Readers' publishing co-op.

Hutchby, I. and Moran-Ellis, J. (eds) (1998) Children and Social Competence, London: Falmer Press.

Ingleby, D. (1976) 'The psychology of child psychology' in R. Dale (ed) Schooling and Capitalism: A Sociological Reader, London: OUP.

Inglis, B. (1986) The Hidden Power, London: Cape.

Isaacs, S. (1933) Social Development in Young Children, London: Routledge.

James, A. and Prout, A. (1990) Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood, Basingstoke: Falmer.

James, A., Jenks, C. and Prout, A. (1997) Theorising Childhood, Cambridge: Polity Press.

James, A. (2004) 'Understanding Childhood from an Interdisciplinary Perspective: Problems and Potentials' in P. Pufall and R. Unsworth (eds) Rethinking Childhood, London: Rutgers University Press.

Jefferson, S. (1943) 'Junior Miss Miracle', Photoplay Magazine August 1943 pp279-280.

Jenks, C. (1982) The Sociology of Childhood, London: Batsford.

Jenks, C. (1996) Childhood, London: Routledge.

Jenks, C. (2003) Transgression, London: Routledge.

Jung, C.G. (1923) Psychological Types: On a Psychology of Individuation, London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner.

Jung, C.G. [1953] (1959) The collected works of C.G Jung, Vol 9 Part 1 (Executive Editor McGuire, W), London: Routledge.

Jung, C.G. (1964) Man and His Symbols, London: Penguin.

Kenway, J. and Bullen, E. (2001) Consuming Children, Buckingham: OUP.

Kerenyi, C. and Jung, C. (1969) Essays on a Science of Mythology, Princeton University Press.

Kessen, W. (1979) 'The American Child and Other Cultural Inventions' *American Psychologist* 34: 815-820.

Kincaid, J. (1992) Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture, London: Routledge.

Kinder, M. (1995) 'Home Alone in the 90s: generational war and transgenerational address in American movies, television and presidential politics', in C. Bazalgette and D. Buckingham (eds) In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences, London: BFI.

Kline, S. (1993) Out of the Garden: Toys, TV and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing, London: Verso.

Kline, S. (1995) 'The Play of the Market: On the Internationalization of Children's Culture' in *Theory, Culture & Society* Vol 12 pp103-129.

Lacan, J. (1977) The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, London: Hogarth Press

Lamparski, R. (1967) Whatever Became of _____? NY: Crown Publishers.

Lash, S. (2001) Critique of Information (Theory, Culture and Society), London: Sage.

Latour, B. and Woolgar, S. (1979) Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts, Sage Publications (USA).

Leach, E. (1963) 'Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal categories and Verbal Abuse,' in P. **Maranda** (1972) Mythology, Middlesex: Penguin.

Lessa, W. A. (1966) 'Discoverer-of-the-Sun: Mythology as a Reflection of Culture' in P. Maranda (1972) Mythology, Middlesex: Penguin.

Levi-Strauss, C. (1978) Myth and Meaning, London: Routledge.

Lussier, T. (2000) 'The Dresden Doll of the Movies: the Virginia Lee Corbin Biography', on www.silentsaregolden.com

Lyotard, J. (1984) The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Malinowski, B. (1927) Myth in Primitive Psychology, London: Routledge.

Maranda, P. (ed) (1972) Mythology, Middlesex: Penguin.

Marchand, R. (1985) Advertising the American Dream, Berkeley: Berkeley University Press.

Marshall, P. (1997) Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press.

Mayall, B. (ed) (1994) Children's Childhoods: Observed and Experienced, London: Falmer.

Mayhew, H. (1985) London Labour and the London Poor, London: Penguin.

McNeil, A. (1996) Total Television, London: Penguin.

Mead, M. (1936) 'Children and Ritual in Bali' in M. Mead and M. Wolfenstein (eds) (1954) Childhood in Contemporary Cultures, London: Phoenix Books.

Mead, M. and Wolfenstein, M. (eds) (1954) Childhood in Contemporary Cultures Phoenix Books: London.

Meyoritz, J. (1985) No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour, NY: OUP

Moran, J. (2002) 'Childhood and nostalgia in contemporary culture,' in *European Journal of Cultural Studies* Vol 5 (2) pp155-173.

Miles, R. (1982) Racism and Migrant Labour, London: Routledge.

Miller, A. (1983) The Drama of the Gifted Child and the Search for the True Self, London: Faber and Faber.

Mulvey, L. (1975) 'Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen* 16 Vol 3, Autumn 1975 pp6-18.

Mulvey, L. (1989) Visual and Other Pleasures, London: Macmillan.

Murray, C. and Hallett, C. (2000) 'Young People's Participation in Decisions Affecting their Welfare' in *Childhood Journal* Vol 7 (1) Feb. 2000.

Nead, L. (1988) Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Neustadter, R. (1989) 'The Politics of Growing Up: The Status of Childhood in Modern Social Thought' in *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* Vol 9 pp199-221.

Newton, M. (2002) Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children, London: Faber and Faber.

- Nietzsche, F.** (1977) A Nietzsche Reader, R. J. Hollingdale (Trans) London: Penguin.
- O'Brien, M.** (1985) The Gifted and Talented: Developmental Perspectives, Washington DC: American Psychological Association.
- Oswell, D.** (1998) 'The place of 'childhood' in internet content regulation: A case study of policy in the UK,' in *International Journal of Cultural Studies* Vol 1(2) pp 271-291.
- Parsons, T.** (1964) Essays in Sociological Theory, London: Macmillan.
- Perel, D. and Ely, S.** (2003) Freak: Inside the Twisted World of Michael Jackson, New York: HarperCollins.
- Peterson, J.** (1987) The Secret Life of Kids, Wheaton Ill: Quest Books.
- Piaget, J.** [1932] (1968) The Moral Judgement of the Child, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Piaget, J.** (1977) The Language and Thought of the Child, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Playfair, G.** (1967) The Prodigy: a study of the strange life of Master Betty, London: Secker & Warburg.
- Pollock, L.** (1983) Forgotten Children, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Postman, N.**[1962] (1994) The Disappearance of Childhood, NY: Vintage Books.
- Potter, J. and Wetherell, M.** (1987) Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour, London: Sage.

- Propp, V.** (1969) Morphology of the Folk Tale, University of Texas Press.
- Price, V.** (2002) 'Child Stars' in St. James Encyclopaedia of Popular Culture, London: Gale Group.
- Pufall, P. and Unsworth, R,** (eds) (2004) Rethinking Childhood, London: Rutgers University Press.
- Qvortrup, J.** (1990) 'A Voice for Children in Statistical and Social Accounting: A Plea for Children's Right to be Heard' in A. James and A. Prout (eds) Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood, London: The Falmer Press.
- Radford, J.** (1990) Child Prodigies and Exceptional Early Achievers, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Rapport , L.** (1999) 'The Relationships Between Professional Experience, Parenting History and Adult Adjustment' published on www.minorcon.org/waynestate.html
- Riessman, C. K.** (1993) Narrative Analysis, London: SAGE Publications.
- Richards, M. and Light, P.** (eds) (1986) Children of Social Worlds, London: Polity Press.
- Robey, D.** (ed) (1973) Structuralism: an introduction, Oxford : Clarendon Press.
- Robinson, H. and Wilson, S.** (1962) The Encyclopaedia of Myths and Legends of all Nations, London: Kaye and Ward.
- Rooney, M.** (1965) i.e.: An Autobiography, NY: G.P.Putnam's Sons.
- Rose, G.** (2001) Visual Methodologies, London: SAGE Publications.

Rose, N. (1985) The Psychological Complex: Psychology, Politics and Society in England 1869-1939, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Rose, N. (1989) Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self, London: Routledge.

Russell, R and Tyler, M. (2002) 'Thank Heavens for little Girls: 'Girls Heaven' and the Commercial Context of Feminine Childhood' in *BSA* Vol 36 No.3 pp619-637.

Rousseau, J. [1762] (1991) Emile, London: Penguin.

Ryan, J. (2000) Former Child Stars: The Story of America's Least Wanted, ECW Press: Toronto.

Saussure, F. (1974) Course in General Linguistics, London: Fontana.

Scheper-Hughes, N. (1989) Child Survival: Anthropological Perspectives on the Treatment and Maltreatment of Children Dor-drecht: Reidel.

Scott, W. (2004) The Works of Sir Walter Scott, New York: Kessinger Publishing

Seale, C.F. (2004) 'Threatened children: media representations of childhood cancer' in M. King and K. Watson (eds) Representing Health: Discourses of Health and Illness in the Media, Palgrave.

Silverman, D. (1985) Qualitative Methodology and Sociology, Aldershot: Gower.

Sims, G.R. (1889) Master and Man. Play. Four Acts, British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Collection.

Singleton-Turner, R. (1999) Children Acting on Television, London: A & C Black.

Smith, F and Barker, J. (2000) 'Contested spaces: children's experiences of out of school care in England and Wales,' in *Childhood: A global journal of child research*, Vol 7, No 3 August 2000 pp315-35.

Spearman, C. (1904) 'General intelligence: Objectively determined and measured' in *American Journal of Psychology*, 115, 1904 pp201-92.

Spearman, C. (1915) 'The Measurement of Intelligence' in *Eugenics Review*, 6, pp312-13.

Stainton Rogers, R and W. (1992) Stories of Childhood: Shifting Agendas of Child Concern, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Steedman, C. (1995) Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Temple Black, S. (1989) Child Star: An Autobiography, London: Headline.

Thomson, D. (1995) A Biographical Dictionary of Film, London: André Deutsch Ltd.

Turner, V. (1974) Dramas, Fields and Metaphors, London: Cornell University Press.

Valentine, C. (1956) The Normal Child, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Van Gennep, A. (1960) The Rites of Passage, London: Routledge.

Walkerdine, V. (1997) Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture, London: McMillan Press.

Warner, M. (1994) Six Myths of our Time: Managing Monsters, The Reith Lectures 1994, London: Vintage.

Warner, M. (1995) From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers, London: Vintage.

Waters, H. (1996) 'That Astonishing Clever Child': Performers and Prodigies in the Earl and Mid-Victorian Theatre' in *Theatre Notebook* Vol 1, No.2 1996.

Wetherell, M and Potter, J. (1992) Mapping the Language of Racism NY: Columbia University Press.

Wetherell, M. Taylor, S. and Yates, S. (2001) Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader, London: SAGE.

Williams, M. (2005) 'I'm not a lady!' *Tiger Bay* (1959) and a transitional girlhood' in *Screen* Vol 46, No.3 Autumn 2005 pp360-375.

Williamson, J.E. (1978) Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising, London: Marion Boyars.

Winnicott, D (1964) The Child, the Family and the Outside World, New York: Penguin.

Wolfenstein, M. (1954) 'The Image of the Child in Contemporary Films' in M. Mead and M. Wolfenstein (eds) (1954) Childhood in Contemporary Cultures, Phoenix Books: London.

Wood, B. (1994) 'Lolita Syndrome' in *Sight and Sound* 4 (6) Jun 1994 p32-34.

Woodhead, M. (1996) In Search of the Rainbow: Pathways to Quality in Large-Scale Programmes for Young Children, The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Yallop, D. (1976) The Day the Laughter Stopped, NY: St Martin's Press.

Zelitzer, V. (1981) 'The Price and Value of Children: The Case of Children's Insurance' in *AJS* Vol 86 No 5 pp 1036-1053.

Zelitzer, V. (1985) Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Value of Children, New York: Basic Books.

Zierold, N. (1965) The Child Stars, Macdonald & Co: London.

Zucchi, J. (1999) Little Slaves of the Harp: Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth Century France, Liverpool University Press: Liverpool.

Websites

www.abcnews.com

www.cinema.com

www.guardian.co.uk

www.harrypotter.warnerbros.co.uk

www.imdb.com

www.ise.uvic.ca

www.justcharlotte.co.uk

www.minorcon.org

www.newspersonline.com

www.openmozart.net

www.silentsaregolden.com

www.silentera.com/archive/photoplay

www.thesun.co.uk