

Revisionary Fantasy

Children's Spatial Practice and the Cambridgeshire Landscape in John Gordon's *The Edge of the World*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Midway through John Gordon's fifth novel for children, *The Edge of the World* (1983), a teenage girl flags down a truck on the outskirts of a rural village. She and her friend need a lift back to their village or there'll be a row with their parents. On the journey, the girl tells the driver "a long story about how they had gone out walking and got lost", but he is incredulous: "Lost? [...] Out here? You can't get lost out here. There's nowhere to get lost in." The girl replies, mysteriously, that she and her friend "managed it", that, in fact, they are "pretty good at it" (Gordon 100).

Kit's exchange with the truck-driver inverts conventional ideas of the lost child, vulnerable to moral degradation, epitomised in countless 'straying-from-the-path' narratives since Red Riding Hood's tumultuous journey. For a child to be lost represents a failure of the social apparatus to adequately guide the individual, but equally supports a characterisation of childhood as a time of explora-

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tion, growing self-determination and adventure. It recalls the wayward victims of neglect indicted by William Blake's work, and the idealised country child running free and without direction evoked by William Wordsworth. Throughout the twentieth century, the lost child was the object of increasing concern for the British establishment, to which the founding of the Scouting movement, the Outward Bound organisation and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme can be viewed as a response. Children's literature reflected this project to 'orientate' the child with non-fiction titles such as Geoffrey Grigson's *Looking and Finding* (1958) and Gordon Copley's *Going into the Past* (1955), the latter even being included in a series of related, improving titles when it was reprinted by Puffin Books: *Going to the Ballet*, *Going to the Opera*, and *Going to a Concert* being the more metropolitan alternatives. Having studied Geography at school all week, children could enjoy an archaeological excursion in their own time, orientating themselves in their regional 'place', to ensure the most productive, enriching and edifying experience. The journey of the lost child is also one of the key themes of children's literature: it is the experience of deepening subjectivity, and threatened alienation, that characterises many novels of emotional maturation for young readers.

Gordon's truck driver cannot conceive of this undeveloped rural Cambridgeshire, a region of wide open fenland, as somewhere you could lose yourself, let alone be lost, whatever your age: lost-ness, for him, is as a place-specific experience. Kit's response is low on detail but essentially true: she and her friend, Tekker, have been out walking, journeying ever further from home into territories which disorientate and amaze them. Getting lost is the beginning of a series of adventures for them, and being "good at it" represents the cultivation of an imaginative response to place that, whilst irrational, brings rich rewards. As I will demonstrate, such a response is closely related to cultural ideas of archaeological awareness implied by Grigson and Copley's non-fiction works. The conversation about lost-ness between Kit and the truck driver exemplifies Gordon's subversion of established tropes of the Romantic child as a figure not only capable of heightened vision and even fantastic visions but revisioning: seeing the landscape anew.

The Edge of the World is a novel steeped in the fenland landscape of Cambridgeshire, and is, like all Gordon's fiction, a work rich with fantastic and supernatural tropes. It continues a convention of children's fantasy, beginning in its first Golden Age and exemplified in some of its most popular texts, whereby travel to another world entails both wonder and adversity for protagonists. Like those literary antecedents of theirs, who visited Wonderland, Oz or Narnia, Kit

and Tekker's travels into and through a fantasy world, vividly contrasted with their own world, comprises a sense of agency and empowerment, particularly in opposing adult foes. Gordon's novel reflects a further trend in post-war British children's literature for fantasy adventures set in rural landscapes imbued with fantastic dimensions, strongly influenced by the work of prolific, well-regarded author, Alan Garner in the 1960s and 70s. This paper argues that by subverting some of the tropes of children's fantasy, Gordon's novel articulates fundamental cultural concerns about how young people explore place. The paper will begin by weighing the cultural trend toward landscape archaeology as a means of imaginative engagement with place and identity, and then considering this series of relationships in Michel de Certeau's theorisation of place and spatial practice. Using this theorisation, I will discuss the meaning of the characters' movement around, under, and over the Edge in Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960), his first novel and exemplary of this rural fantasy trend. Based on the superfluity of shared tropes between the two texts, I will contrast Garner's 1960 approach to the theme with that of his lesser-known contemporary, John Gordon, whose *The Edge of the World* novel takes the reader on a tour through multiple borderlines and visions.

2 JACQUETTA HAWKES AND GEOFFREY GRIGSON: ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

In 1950, the Festival of Britain, government-backed and forward-looking, celebrated national identity with pavilions of futuristic design, artwork and innovation; yet in that same setting, it made an overt turn to the past. Along the exterior of the 'Land of Britain' pavilion, painter Graham Sutherland's giant mural 'The Origins of the Land' depicted geological formations and early life as only Sutherland could: a phantasmagoria of mutations and mutability, as if to remind visitors that their nationality (and their reason to be festive) was only an accident of history. Reflecting this engagement with the material land was a nearby sculpture, cast in bronze, by Henry Moore. Moore's *Reclining Figure* was more recognisably human than Sutherland's weird forms, but only schematically, marked by those characteristics of erosion that define our sense of antiquity. At the Festival, it would have contributed to a theme of British identity informed by the material evidence of ancient British history, be it uncanny, inconclusive or hard to conceive of: in short, the matter of the archaeological imagination.

A year later, in *A Land*, her idiosyncratic account of the formation of the British Isles, writer, archaeologist and adviser to the Festival, Jacquetta Hawkes celebrated Moore's affinity with prehistoric forms. He was one of several modern artists who spoke to Hawkes's scientific and philosophical interests, mediating aesthetically a convergence of history, materiality, and a Romanticist consciousness of being in the here and now. As she expressed the idea, in *A Land*: "Geologists and archaeologists [...] [are] instruments of consciousness who are engaged in reawakening the memory of the world" (Hawkes 26). Though Hawkes expresses herself somewhat flamboyantly, modern writers on nineteenth century science have acknowledged that "the history of geology is the history of imaginative reconstructions", whilst the cultivation of an imaginative response to the material evidence of the past was crucial to nineteenth century archaeology (Baumgart 34).

The artwork of Moore's peers reflected a new, democratic, and disorientating attitude to archaeology in the twentieth century. The trauma of modern warfare and threat of invasion may have renewed urgency to the task described by Hawkes; a Neo-Romantic artistic sensibility twinned apprehension of landscape in its most surrealist material forms with a heightened subjectivity, engendered by awareness of mortality. It was also the era of a War Artist scheme, Recording Britain, to memorialise British place through watercolour images of significant landscape detail. The medium, employed by artists such as John Piper, evokes their subject's fragility and the sense of it being imminently lost. Piper wrote to fellow artist, Paul Nash, about such particular details in the context of Piper's *British Romantic Artists* (1942), that "dreams are *not* as romantic as bits of real experience" (qtd. in Harris 155, emphasis in original). Elsewhere, he juxtaposed an aerial photo of ancient earthwork Silbury Hill with an abstract painting by Joan Miró, again emphasising the affinities of archaeological technique and radical new artistic endeavour. The materiality of the past, whether eroded or enduring, was intrinsic to an evolving British identity.

Piper's aerial shot of Silbury Hill was part of a new way of doing, and seeing, archaeology. War had altered not only the psychic temperament of the nation, but the way in which archaeology was done in Britain and the way its results were perceived. In the interwar period, aerial photography had revealed an unknown country in the ostensibly familiar British pastoral scene, equally available and exciting to archaeologists, artists, and the lay person: in fact, all three personas could be compressed into one by cultivating aesthetic and scientific powers of observation through the popular pursuit of landscape archaeology. O.G.S.

Crawford, the Ordnance Survey's archaeology officer, called field archaeology "an essentially English form of sport", directly associated with the hiking, scouting, and orienteering that typified youth movements of the era (qtd. in Matless 79). The historian David Matless has summarised the consequent cultural project (books, journals, organised movements) as the ideal of "geographer-citizenship" (78). Perhaps inevitably, this interest came to impact on the young citizens for whom Geography and History were institutionally part of their daily lives. In 1922, the Kent Education Committee's "Aids and Suggestions for the Teaching of Local History" stressed direct engagement with material culture to stimulate children's imaginative responses to the past: "The flinthead must be handled and dreamed over ere the Palaeolithic man or Neolithic man appears; the urn must be caressed before we have the vision of the Roman soldier; the old parchment crackled before the enclosed fields can lose their hedges" (qtd. in Corbishley 145).

Landscape archaeology encouraged an interpretative, evidence-based approach to both local and national history, whilst offering access for young people to a wider discipline that could be pursued solitarily outside the classroom. In *Going into the Past* (1955), Copley introduces his readers to the features of ancient sites they should look out for, but warns them that "you must not dig into them" (16). Instead, "going into the past will become a very exciting detective adventure" (16). It is clear from Copley's text that such a time-travelling detective story will be entirely possible without an excavation. Meanwhile, poet Geoffrey Grigson's book for children, *Looking and Finding* (1958, subtitled "and Collecting and Reading and Investigating and Much Else") takes a different approach but shares Copley's emphasis on powers of observation and subjective aesthetic response. Whilst Grigson's rather permissive attitude to digging things up contradicts the advice of archaeologists like Copley, it stresses the significance of all found objects (such as chipped flints and badger skulls) over an obsession with 'treasure.' Grigson is concerned less with the scientific discipline of archaeology than with the subjective, imaginative sense of place consciousness, as when he recommends reading local poets as "encouragers and appetizers" but notes that you do not have to visit the sites they describe, which are now "quite considerably spoilt" (25). Like Copley, he promises readers a trip into the past and urges them to get to know their local area as the means of that journey, stating that "maps are time machines" whether obtained from stationers', at birthdays, or by other means ("Are you on good terms with the vicar or rector?" (16-17)). Even a one-inch map "will tell you where to find [...] desirable things to know and explore" (Grigson 13) and

Grigson's dry yet suggestive list of these desirables is like a gazetteer of places haunted by vanished human activity:

Old roads	Canals in use
Roman roads	Canals disused
Green lanes	Fords
Footpaths	Footbridges
Old railways	Ferries

[A map] will guide you to:

Churches with square towers	Windmills
Churches with spires	Watermills
Castles and ruins	Burial mounds
Ancient chapels	Burial chambers
Ancient houses	Camps and forts
Follies and monuments	Standing stones
Dovecotes	Deserted villages
Barns	Battlefields
Pounds	Old mines and mineheaps

(Grigson 13)

The pleasures of local history offered by Grigson's nostalgic itinerary of various sorts of memorials recall Hawkes's claims for the work of archaeologists. Grigson is not proposing an educational excursion, but a pleasurable, Romantic encounter with the remains of human activity; like the Kent Schools Board, he sees material contact with antiquity as a necessary spur to the imagination, and thereby to deeper historical appreciation.

On the brink of what is now described as a Second Golden Age in children's literature, Geoffrey Grigson's 1958 work of non-fiction coincided precisely with Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*, (just four years after Lucy M. Boston's *The Children of Green Knowe* (1954), another story of time travel in a Romantic setting). In 1960, Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* presented a similar encounter of past, present, mundane, and fantastic, out in the countryside. It was the opener for two decades of landscape fantasies, including several titles by Garner, *The Dark Is Rising* sequence by Susan Cooper, *The Wild Hunt of Hagworthy* and others by Penelope Lively, and multiple children's television dramas. In her study of this era in children's publishing, Lucy Pearson informs us that "[both] the critical texts and the children's books [of the 1960s and 1970s] present ima-

gination and fantasy as central and necessary aspects of childhood. This construction of the child reader had important implications for the kind of literature that was regarded as ‘good’ for young readers” (34). Copley’s promise of “a very exciting detective adventure” (16), Grigson’s time machines and list of atmospheric locales, together with the Kent Education Committee’s guidance on teaching history, are aligned with the ideology and, indeed, content of many titles forming a trend in British post-war children’s fantasy, such as Alan Garner’s *Weirdstone* and related authors, including John Gordon. In their leisure pursuits and their reading material, children were encouraged to explore and interpret the elements of rural landscape to cultivate an archaeological imagination which took them along a borderline of history and fantasy.

3 MICHEL DE CERTEAU AND ALAN GARNER: MAPPING THE WIZARD

Such explorations are illuminated by the philosopher Michel de Certeau’s theorisation of place and space and the ways in which they are produced and used, that is, our spatial practices. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980) he presents the ‘everyday’ experience as the artificial effect of colonising and homogenising forces, to which specialised practice is necessary for resistance. In exploring the nature of cultural resistance as it already exists undetectably as cultural consumption, he considers a variety of forms of active resistance to homogenisation, including the very activity of navigating *place*, with its elements stabilised in “relationships of coexistence”, as distinguished from a *space*, where arrangements are typified by ambiguity and change (117). De Certeau is not distinguishing two different sorts of territory here, but the ways through which the nature of a territory changes (or becomes unstable) through its users’ spatial practice. “The law of the ‘proper’ rules in the place”, whereas space “occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it” and cannot be stable, univocal or ‘proper’ (117). Every self-determined walk through a landscape, along a chosen route, ‘actualises’ possibilities, creates a *here* and a *there*, and alters the nature of the place they explore. This consciousness of subjective experience to the point of existentialism is intrinsically childlike: to deploy spatial practices “is thus to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood; it is, in a place, *to be other and to walk toward the other*” (de Certeau 110-11, emphasis in original).

Walking about a place – and the degree to which we are conscious of our route – is only one of the spatial practices analysed by de Certeau. Talking about

place is another, and a corresponding sensitivity to the ways in which place is founded or shaped by story (whether local legend or legal narratives about place ownership). Story, per se, is a “delinquent” entity, with no fixed existence within or outside any boundaries, but only “in the interstices” of its own codes (130). Whilst it articulates and marks out the boundaries of space, in doing so it charges those boundaries with narrative meaning. De Certeau contrasts the experience of the tour, which reflects the subjectivity and contingency of our childlike walk, with the artifice of the map, which totalises our experience of time and place, effacing history, and correlating landscape features of different orders, times, and narratives. With his influence, we can perceive the geographer-citizen ideal as an attempted act of stabilisation, in which the Romanticist ideal of the child is repositioned as consumer of ‘desirable things’ (on a map). This attempted stabilisation, however, is potentially undermined by the strangeness and Romanticism inspired by landscape archaeology in post-war British culture. There is a latent Neo-Romanticism invoked by the images conjured by Grigson’s ‘desirable things’, and in that sense of finding oneself *being-here* which Hawkes celebrated in the work of archaeologists and artists alike. In narratives which suggest the possibility of going off the map, a space is provided for experiences of wonder and terror, as in the work of Alan Garner and John Gordon.

Alan Garner’s first novel, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) is set around and beneath the wooded sandstone ridge of Alderley Edge, its eighteenth-century mines and local village, and features not one map but two of the local area. This follows a longstanding publishing convention both in genre fiction and children’s literature, emphasising fidelity to real place but also presenting through semi-metaphorical features a guideline for navigating genre. The map of Pooh Bear’s “100 Aker Wood” (“Drawn by me and Mr Shephard helpd”) depicts a real locale transformed by a child’s cartography, acknowledging the mapping process as a subjective, even creative exercise; Pauline Baynes’s maps for the *Narnia* books of C. S. Lewis highlight his references to medievalist fantasy through overt pastiche; Charles Green’s map of Punchbowl Farm, setting for a pony series by Monica Edwards, was also based on a real place (Edwards’ own farm) but its more conventional style evokes a sense of stable verisimilitude. Green is also responsible for the maps of Alderley Edge that, with “The Legend of Alderley” prefaces Part One of *Weirdstone*, and that of the wider Cheshire countryside (plotting “The Journey from Highmost Redmanhey”) prefaces Part Two. In Green’s maps of Garner’s landscape, however, it is as if the stone table of Narnia has erupted through the neighbouring valley to Punchbowl Farm. On the

first, beneath the legend “Saddle Bole” are the disconcerting words “& Svart Warren”, whilst alongside the “Druid Stones”, “Golden Stone” and “Thieves’ Hole” is the clear yet mysterious legend marked “The Wizard”. The map correlates real and fantastical objects without hierarchy or delineation; it demonstrates diagrammatically the archaeological process Garner’s novel narrates through the explorations of his characters, and in the process his text takes the reader on a tour of a very specific place, known to him from a young age: “I grew up on the Edge, aware of its magic and accepting it. I didn’t know that it wasn’t the same for everyone. I didn’t know that not all children played, by day and by night, the year long, on a wooded hill where knights slept in the ground” (Garner, “Introduction” 11).

Garner refers here to the local legend of Alderley Edge, a tale recurring around the British Isles, of a farmer who meets a wizard on his path home from market, agrees to sell him his mare, and, through a pair of iron gates, glimpses a hall of slumbering knights awaiting the day “when England shall be in direst peril, and England’s mothers weep” (Garner, *Brisingamen* 13). By including “The Wizard” on his map, Green is playfully creating an intentional confusion of geography, legend, and culture: as is just visible on the map, he is referring not to the wizard of the story but an Alderley pub, to which the legend gave its name. Yet there is a wizard in Garner’s novel; he is explicitly identified as the one in the legend (and by extension, the pub sign). In Garner’s novel, the “Iron Gates”, which opened for the farmer in this ancient legend and are clearly marked on the map, open once again for a modern-day pair of children who have indirectly inherited an otherworldly talisman (the titular Weirdestone) which dark forces are now in pursuit of. The children, Colin and Susan, have the inverse of Garner’s own experience of the Edge: they find it unfamiliar and mysterious, he “didn’t know that it wasn’t the same” for all children elsewhere; they have no knowledge of the legend, he grew up “aware [...] and accepting of it”. They are visiting from another town and are sternly warned about the lie of the land by their guardian, Gowther Mossock, a farmer whose overtly signalled Cheshire dialect emphasises his kinship with the region: “When you’re up th’ Edge, see you dunner venture down ony caves you might find, and keep an eye open for any holes in the ground [...] If you went down theer and got lost that’d be the end of you, for even if you missed falling down a hole you’d wander about in the dark until you upped and died” (Garner, *Brisingamen* 22).

Despite respecting Mossock’s warning, the children explore the Edge looking for the iron gates of the story, going back after sunset through an area unknown

to them. They do not at this point fall into the mine workings, but are instead beset by elvish creatures, the *svarts*. In their pursuit through the woods “in the fear and the dusk, [Colin has] lost his bearings and all he knew was that their way lay uphill and not down” (34), so that even his proximal sense of place has been removed, just when it is most urgently needed. Though rescued here by the wizard and taken to the safety of Fundindelwe, the children again stray from the recommended path; their enemy conjures a mist in which they are lost a second time, nearly falling to their deaths. Midway through the book, the children get lost in ancient subterranean caves: racing up and down in the dark, across chasms and into repeated dead ends, Colin is again reduced to desperation, running “un-thinkingly. Tunnels, caverns, tunnels: an endless desolation of sand and rock” (113). The corollary of the earlier geographer-citizen ideal, exemplified by Copley and Grigson’s work, seems to be existential and fantastic terror for the child who strays off the map. Indeed, in the final quarter of the novel, when the children are fleeing across the Cheshire landscape, they are in one scene watched by a pair of witches who choose the wholesome appearance of hikers as their disguise, suggesting, on Garner’s part, an ironic view at least of landscape as leisure pursuit. The usual means of stabilising place reveal its ambiguities; the visual field emphasised by Copley and Grigson misleads; unmediated engagement with the forces behind the lie of the land (in all senses) lead to physical and mental disorientation and terror. Nonetheless, Garner’s work and works like Grigson’s share a sensibility: the urge is for children to explore and gain a sense of place-consciousness that is deeply felt, not merely in cool scientific curiosity but an unmediated Romantic sense of the sublime and the irrational. Garner’s text, however, is more explicit about the dangers of getting lost in the process.

Garner has since discussed how, through the application of archaeological practice to oral history and folklore, he developed a theory that the story of the Sleeping Knights, in the specific version he inherited, narrates the walking of a boundary between two parishes, perhaps for a ritual horse sacrifice (the Farmer’s mare taken to the site of the deity’s burial spot) (Garner, “Oral History” 78). In retracing its places, Garner’s text illuminates de Certeau’s characterisation of story as ‘delinquent’ by walking his children through the liminal territory of the borderline itself, and later, under the map entirely. Given this context, it is easy to see Colin and Susan as unwitting *mearcstapas*, boundary walkers. The Middle English term, describing Beowulf’s monstrous foe Grendel, is adopted by Jane Carroll in her bold application of topological theory to the themes and tropes of children’s literature, specifically the *The Dark Is Rising* sequence by Susan

Cooper. Carroll demonstrates a correlation of meaningful landscape features throughout a sequence that, like Alan Garner's work, revolves around themes of rural landscape, folklore and the fantastic, and young protagonists: *The Dark Is Rising*, for example, narrates the awakening and initiation of a young magician, Will Stanton. Will, in Carroll's description, "has one foot in the real and unreal, not just dwelling [like Grendel] in the margins but patrolling and protecting them too" (46). In Garner's novel, the child characters not only inhabit this liminal position by moving back and forth between real and fantastic realms, but physically moving along boundaries and geographical ambiguities, deploying the geographer-citizen's spatial practice informed by an unworldliness and imaginative facility characteristic of the Romantic child. Whenever they are without an adult guide, however, they are portrayed as lacking agency and repeatedly threaten to become permanently lost. Tracing the elements of place in their most literal and material aspects (at one point crawling claustrophobically through the Edge's cave system), the children's narrative effaces all metaphoric or symbolic aspects. The mingling of fantastical and mundane in the material fabric of the landscape makes it a place in which neither orthodox behaviour nor any resistant spatial practice will help them.

4 JOHN GORDON: SCALING THE LANDSLIP

John Gordon and Alan Garner's novels share a sensibility, but the authors' lives and critical attention diverge significantly. Born a decade earlier, Gordon's experience of displacement significantly precedes Garner's experience of alienation at Cambridge University (where he chose not to complete his Classical degree). When he was a child, Gordon's family left the industrial town of Jarrow, the same year that workers from the town were marching to London in protest at their conditions of endemic poverty. Gordon's new home in Wisbech, a market town in the Cambridgeshire fens, was radically different to Jarrow; its surrounding fenland landscape, seemingly unworked, provides the setting for the outright majority of his prolific career in fiction. His initial profile in children's literature criticism was high, and his debut novel, *The Giant under the Snow* (1967) remains in print, but Gordon has never received the plaudits or critical examination of his peers, whereas Garner, a Carnegie Medal-winner in 1967, was the subject of an exhaustive monograph in 1981 and has featured in many major studies since. Gordon has nonetheless produced a substantial body of work which offers an

alternative approach to the matter of children's spatial practice and archaeological imagination in areas of manifestly ancient countryside. *The Edge of the World* (1983) is among the novels that have received the least critical attention, but has plenty to offer here.

In summary, the plot closely resembles that of *Weirdstone*: two teenagers, entrusted with a magical talisman, must navigate a rural landscape, evading dangerous magical forces to deliver the talisman safely to a benevolent elder. Rather than brother and sister, Kit and Tekker are close friends with an understated romantic bond, which Gordon subtly displays by showing the pair experimenting with the intimacy of reading one another's minds. During one of these experiments, Tekker finds he can draw the pair of them into an alternate world; this skill, he learns, can be modulated with a small, flat disk of ancient bog oak. The bog oak disk is given to them by a World War I pilot, John Welbeck, to help them venture after his lost love, a prisoner in the other world, held by her sister, Ma Grist. When Kit's brother is also captured, the young protagonists must travel through the alien landscape and effect a rescue.

The nature of the fantastic here, though again made material by a rural landscape, is of a different order than that of *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*. The fantastic otherworld is unnamed and uninhabited (except for the Horsehead creatures set by Grist to guard her sister) and seems to have its own temporality, as when the protagonists find John Welbeck's crashed airplane, not eroded by the intervening decades. In Garner's novel, the fantastic sites intersected geographically with the mundane ones: Fundindelve's location was proscribed by the fixed points of maps and legend. The otherworld of Gordon's novel overlays that of the fens for as long as the children explore it: Kit and Tekker are immersed in its alterity, and must keep it secret. It has the quality of a shared dream, and Gordon implicitly links it to the teenagers' experiments with mind control: a visionary landscape, albeit one in which the heat of the sun can burn and dazzle. When, escaping from a Horsehead, the pair find themselves abruptly back in the 'real' world, the confusion of 'waking' makes them doubt the precepts of their rationalism and the limits of their imaginative powers: "Funny sort of imagination if we both saw the same thing together. Must be pretty strong", suggests Tekker, while Kit wonders, "You don't think we're going mad, do you?" (75). The interrelation of fantasy with reality has consequences for their sense of identity as rational beings: believing in ghosts or other worlds destabilises the rest of the world, because "there must be lots of other things that are true" (21). Kit's brother Dan, on the other hand, "won't believe a thing unless [he] can touch it", according

to Tekker (10), but this dialectic of materiality and imagination is undermined early on. When he falls under Grist's control, it happens with the superficial appearance of mental trauma and then catatonia. Kit and Tekker have adopted the role of genre *mearcstapas*, and the borders they patrol are interior to themselves, invisible on a map (the dialectic of interior and exterior being symbolised by the need to turn the bog oak disk upright or face-down).

For some time, Gordon's characters are disturbed by thoughts of madness and hallucination, the events of which the reader is required to make their own interpretation. Even once the novel shifts fully into the fantastic mode, with Kit and Tekker's sustained and deliberate explorations of the otherworld, this remains a novel concerned with the orientation of the self toward the fantastic, and of underlying structures of meaning. The other world is such a sharp contrast to the flat, featureless marshland of the fens, the two worlds appear symbolically twinned, as colourful fantasy to grey reality: a world of burning red deserts, mossy cliffs, cities of glass and ancient-looking canals. If the other world is uninhabited, however, such features appear initially mysterious. With few external reference points, the other world appears not to signify anything more historical or material than the imagination of the characters and their author. Yet this appearance, like others in the novel, is somewhat deceptive, and Kit and Tekker's journey through the other world reveals its curious correspondence to that of the fens.

Having escaped from the Horseheads, they return temporarily to their own world on a nearby farm; later, after hiking to the edge of a sheer cliff, the bog oak disk turns them up on the railway embankment near Manea, so far from town they have to hitchhike home with a truck-driver (as previously described). Gordon's novel, like Garner's, provides a tour for its readers of his chosen landscape, but its transitions are immaterial and unmappable. The protagonists have transferred from *there* to *here*, but their means of exploration is irrational and undirected, and fully incorporates the experience of being lost. The effect is not a deepening of knowledge but a greater disorientation. As the truck driver remarks, the terrain around Manea is flat and featureless enough that it would be hard to "get lost" there, but unbeknownst to him they have been operating with a "delinquent" mode of spatial practice that is informed by the fantastic, irrational and subjective. Not only does it allow them to get lost in a place they know well, but it also helps orientate them in a more complex view of landscape. This spatial practice is one they adopt throughout the novel, even when not pursued by monsters. Unlike Colin and Susan, assisted throughout the novel by adult figures,

Tekker and Kit have to operate outside their parents' awareness, sneaking out of the house at night or onto land belonging to other people, to fully comprehend local place and recent events. Gordon emphasises their delinquent manoeuvres still further in this brief hitchhiking scene, by contrasting their nimble explorations with the vehicle they return home in, a heavy, industrial vehicle driven solely for business along motorways. The driver's route is the stabilising agent of place, while the teenagers' movements present the fens as a space of possibility. As their exploration as *mearcstapas* continues, it proves to be archaeological as well as geographical, along both historical and geological points of divergence.

When they arrive at what looks like a city of glass platforms and spires, the obvious antecedent in children's literature is the gleaming Emerald City at the heart of Baum's Oz; Tekker scoffs as Kit's description of it as a palace: "We really are in the fens now [...] And whoever heard of a palace out in the fens?" (115). The apparently offhand conversation is soon succeeded by high drama, but when they emerge into their own world, in the small town of Manea, Tekker recalls the summer palace of King Charles I, proposed but never built here. The historical facts of the King's plan, dependent on the unpopular project to drain the fens, overturned by vehement local opinion emboldened by Oliver Cromwell, are barely suggested; the relation between a grand, abortive project of land management and a fantastic, alternate world is implicit. The canals of the other world, too, gain a greater significance in light of this revelation, as does the immense mossy cliff that they have just perilously scaled, "green and ribbed, like an ocean tilted up against the sky", naïvely described by Tekker as "a landslide. It's like being at the bottom of the sea" (111). Having shifted his characters into a fantastical mode of experiencing landscape, Gordon utilises them as guides for his reader, touring the real landscape of the fenlands in all its imaginable possibilities.

The possibilities depicted here are specifically pertinent to the landscape's historical contingencies, impossible to see and essential to imagine: a geological shift which might have restructured the land, a project to drain the fens which might have altered its substance, a demonstration of royal decree that might have reoriented history. This is no directly alternate world, but an imaginative space constituted of ideas: "And ideas grow", says Tekker, the novel's explorer in matters of the psyche (122). The novel's otherworld is a depiction of the archaeological imagination's power, to illuminate not merely the unseen worlds of the past but the strangely accidental, contingent quality of the immediate present to which the viewer belongs.

The investigative spatial practice of the geographer-citizen, informed by that of the adolescent within their parents' jurisdiction, has here led Gordon's young protagonists through the apparently 'proper' and stable surface of their home landscape, into the strata of possibilities which have composed their 'place' in the world (or do so for the time being). "This land is all water, did you know that?" the ex-pilot John Welbeck tells them. "It's got silver veins when you fly over it. All those dykes and cuts and canals catch the sun and make a mesh that dazzles you" (33). He describes for them his informed, aerial view, confirming the shifting, uncanny nature of their home. It is significant, not only that he knows the land through this aerial view (and thus recalls the cultural shift in Britain's perception of itself, aerial photography), but that he provides a link between the teenagers of the 1980s and the psychical earthquake of wartime. In the specialised territory of the other world, Welbeck's wrecked Bristol Scout lies embedded in the sand, "a fragile honeycomb of thin struts, all as yellow as old bones"; happening on the crash site and his flying coat is "like finding an ancient tomb and searching it for treasure" (52-54). Kit describes it as beautiful, but also finds the flying helmet alarming. It is simultaneously an object of archaeological strangeness, on which they must find some perspective and in which they must interpret some sense of meaning, and an act of violence and death that might have happened just the day before. Welbeck and his lover, Stella, mirror Kit and Tekker through their unique yet shared perspective on the Cambridgeshire fens; like them, they have gained a radical and insightful apprehension of the contingency of place and the power of ideas through their idiosyncratic movements across, around, and over it.

5 CONCLUSION

"Look at that land out there", the restlessly investigative Tekker instructs Kit, early in *The Edge of the World*, "[i]t looks flat and dull but it's full of things you'd never guess. I feel I could split it wide open like a skin and find something else inside it" (21). Gordon's novel, like Garner's, presents landscape as something composed of multiple dimensions, composite stories, and prospective metaphors. When either author gives an aerial view, whether in a peritextual map or the words of a pilot, it is to deliberately present that view as strange, distorted, and partial. The stories they tell are, viewed at a great distance from above, rather similar: a journey to be made, a borderline to walk, a fantastic power to be

reckoned with. In both novels, we can identify the enduring anxieties and reassurances of the archaeological landscape in the twentieth century: the promise of buried matters awaiting invocation through appropriate practice.

In their differences of approach, we see different modes of navigating that uncanny yet homely field of reference. That of Garner proscribes the movements of its child protagonists, and by analogy, its child reader, through a mapped landscape in which boundaries are continuously re-emphasised. To be lost in this territory renders the children helpless and terrified, and in awe of the place's prehistoric significance. In Gordon's novel, the children's exploration of the landscape is dreamlike and haywire, and behaving delinquently to the extent of getting lost is directly related to their agency as adolescents. The fantastic realm Kit and Tekker visit has a direct correspondence to the one they inhabit, yet Gordon's treatment of it emphasises the role of the viewer and their subjectivity in perceiving the relation of the two. Both texts draw upon the developmental idea of the geographer-citizen, exemplified in Copley and Grigson's texts, and the idea that material contact with landscape has a role in orienting the child toward their own sense of history. Gordon's novel, in acknowledging the imaginative power of the viewer, suggests the potential of the imagination to reveal what implicit structures are applied by governing agencies to produce stable place out of space. As much as it demonstrates the enduring nature of the geographer-citizen ideal, and a trope of intuition and imagination with its roots in the ideals of Romanticism, Gordon's novel portrays the experience of childhood exploration as an imaginative exercise in selfhood, with the potential to shed light on the present as well as the past.

De Certeau's theories of spatial practice illuminate these manoeuvres and their various effects on the landscape. They highlight the unexplored possibilities of Gordon's disregarded children's novels, and particularly his reinterpretation of the place of the Romantic child. Walking, for de Certeau, awakens consciousness of one's subjectivity in a way that references a joyful sense of otherness and agency, which is in his description, innately childlike. In Gordon's novel, that displacement may be joyful, romantic, or terrifying, whilst the site of the walk itself becomes not only a place of visions but the site of revisionary fantasies.

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