

# “For ever and ever”: The Nostalgic Appeal of *Swallows and Amazons*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

When Titty was renamed Tatty in the 2016 BBC film adaptation of Arthur Ransome’s *Swallows and Amazons* (first published in 1930), there was inevitable commentary in the media. What sad reflection was this on modern society, that something as innocent as a girl’s name (a name originally lifted by Ransome from the daughter of a family friend) must be changed for fear of smutty innuendo and sniggering at the back of the cinema? The niece of Mavis Altounyan, widely credited as Ransome’s inspiration for Titty, wrote a letter to *The Telegraph* in 2016 which was quoted across the British press. The name change was, she

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said, “political correctness”, which “runs the risk of leaving audiences ignorant of the innocence and charm of Arthur Ransome’s children’s novel” (qtd. in Furness n. pag.). The substitution of Tatty for Titty, and – in what was arguably the greater liberty taken by the film’s writers – the insertion of an entirely new plot strand centring on a Russian spy ring, captured the headlines. However, the film’s most striking departure from the original novel is its portrayal of adults and children, both individually and in relation to each other. The film invites us to problematise contemporary childhood by comparing it to the depiction of children’s experiences as portrayed in the world of *Swallows and Amazons*.

The fact that Ransome’s story is considered worthy of a new film adaptation suggests that his writing has transmuted into a legacy that is remembered and recognised even by those who may never have read the original texts. His collection of novels has become part of the UK’s heritage and the landscape he portrays is as intrinsically important as the characters within it. Another conclusion that can be drawn from the latest iteration of *Swallows and Amazons* in film is that, at this point in time, adult audiences are more invested in his work than children are. As Peter Hunt observes, Ransome’s novels have “reached the stage where adult nostalgia is taking over from children’s enthusiasm” and it is this particular attraction that is exploited by the producers of this latest film adaptation, which taps into adult memories of childhood reading and experience (122).

## **2 HOW ADULT RESPONSES TO SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS REFLECT CHILDHOOD MEMORIES AND NOSTALGIA**

The fact that adult audiences retain a proprietorial interest in Ransome is a reason why the changes to his original story sparked such interest, and demonstrates the continuing hold that nostalgia and memory have upon adults’ cultural beliefs. Nostalgia has the power to evoke strong memories of childhood which, in turn, can lead to comparisons with the way in which childhood is constructed today. The publicity the new film garnered (not to mention the fact that it was made in the first place) points to the continuing value placed on Ransome’s work, nearly ninety years since its first publication.

From the outset, *Swallows and Amazons* was recognised as a book worthy of adult attention; the first edition was reviewed by Malcolm Muggeridge in the *The Manchester Guardian* (21 July 1930) at a time when, as Eleanor Graham observed in her recollections of the children’s book-trade in the early 1930s, “there was

virtually no reviewing of children's books" (105). Even then, Muggeridge acknowledged the duality that occurs when reading a children's book as an adult: "An adult has to refer back to his own childhood and ask himself: Would I have enjoyed such a book then? The answer, in the case of *Swallows and Amazons*, is very definitely, Yes". (n. pag.) Muggeridge goes on to praise Ransome's ability to write about children without patronising them, yet, to his mind, realistically, for "nothing makes drearier reading than the conscious juvenility of adults" (n. pag.).

Is this quality of writing the reason for continued adult attention and loyalty to this series above those of Ransome's other contemporaries, many of whom have not enjoyed the same level of attention by subsequent generations? Ransome's closest competitor in terms of sales and enduring appeal is Enid Blyton, and adult attitudes to her books are generally far less affectionate or respectful, despite some recent rehabilitation within academia, prompted by the work of scholars such as David Rudd. While Blyton's subject matter – groups of children embarking upon adult-free adventures – and largely rural setting might share superficial similarities, Ransome and Blyton had very different approaches to their craft. Blyton's technique, as the self-proclaimed "children's 'heroine'" was to "become" a child, to position herself within their world and write from that perspective (n. pag.). Ransome, in contrast, insisted that he wrote for himself, and that the resulting text appealed to children was something beyond his control:

And now then, about this writing for children. I know absolutely nothing about it, for the very simple reason that I NEVER NEVER do it. Unless I am writing something that is good fun FOR ME, not for somebody else, I cannot write at all. The children who read my books are never addressed. I don't even know they are there. They merely overhear me larking about for my own fun, not for theirs (*Signalling from Mars* 274).

Children can enjoy both approaches, but adults grow out of Blyton's fictional world, whereas they can retain pleasure, albeit of a more detached quality, in Ransome's work by continuing to listen to children as they perform within the narrative. Unlike Blyton's work, Ransome's use of language and characterisation is nuanced enough to reward adult re-reading. For example, in *Swallows and Amazons*, when Titty, left alone on the island, waves her mother goodbye:

She lay down on the look-out point, and watched mother through the telescope. Suddenly she found that she could not see her. She blinked, pulled

out her handkerchief, and wiped first the telescope glass and then her eye. 'Duffer,' she said. 'That's with looking too hard. Try the other eye.' (201)

I argue however that the reason for *Swallows and Amazons*' continuing popularity with adults is less to do with such re-reading of the text. Of more relevance is its power to resurrect memories – either of adventures or holidays, or simply of childhood responses to the book. Any book as a material object can evoke just as strong a response as its contents; a tattered book cover has the power to transport readers back to their first encounter with the text in quite a visceral way. Whether re-discovering an original copy or picking a new edition off a bookshop shelf, these adult experiences of re-reading the book, or revisiting the story via a film adaptation, can prompt thoughts of the contrast between remembered childhood and the way in which children are perceived to live within contemporary society. I will explore this dichotomy in more detail later in this paper.

Alongside individual responses prompted by personal experiences and memories, what *Swallows and Amazons* also represents is nostalgia for a time that, even if not directly experienced by individual readers, is instinctively missed on a “national cultural level” (Watkins 167). Tied in with this idea are concerns about the environmental impact of modern agricultural methods on the countryside, highlighted in reports such as the RSPB's *State of Nature 2016*, which asserted that “[m]any factors have resulted in changes to the UK's wildlife over recent decades, but policy-driven agricultural change was by far the most significant driver of declines”(6). Running parallel to this are concerns, voiced by organisations such as walking and cycling charity Sustrans in its 2010 *Free Range Kids* report, of the “loss of habitat” in which children can experience independent, outdoor adventures (2). Yet these worries are not unique to the twenty-first century. Indeed Ransome, in the view of some critics, was nostalgic even as he was writing. Victor Watson, for example, observes that Ransome's work, like others in what Watson has defined as the “camping and tramping” genre so popular in this period, represented “a sustained and essentially *adult* elegy on a massive scale for dearly loved and vanishing rural ways of life, mediated through fiction intended for young readers” (79).

Moving to the present, readings of Ransome's work, most recently Julian Lovelock's *Swallows, Amazons and Coots* (2016), continue to question how Ransome's depiction of a vanished world resonates with modern audiences. Patrick Wright posits that: “[e]ven when they are told of times past, stories are judged

and shaped by their relevance to what is happening now, and in this sense their allegiance is unashamedly to the present” (15). Yet responses to Ransome’s pastoral ideal, in contrast to what is perceived to be the troubled state of contemporary childhood, suggest that the present is judged harshly.

### 3 HOW MEMORIES ARE CONFLATED WITH CONTEMPORARY CONCERNS FOR CHILDHOOD

The version of childhood as portrayed in Ransome’s fiction has no interest in commercialism. When the children want a flag for their camp, Titty sews one from scraps of left-over material (“some blue serge that had once been part of a pair of knickerbockers”(27)). The level of consumerism depicted is broadly limited to the purchase of four bottles of ginger beer and twenty yards of rope. The activities undertaken by Ransome’s protagonists – sailing, striking camp, exploring the countryside – are conflated with freedom and innocence particularly because of the book’s rural setting.

However, research into contemporary British childhood suggests that such freedom and ease with nature is not reflected in modern children’s experiences. Reports such as Stephen Moss’s *Natural Childhood*, commissioned by the National Trust in 2012, discuss the implications of “nature deficit disorder” on the current generation of children. Within a global context, a 2007 UNICEF report put UK children at the bottom of a league table of 21 industrialised countries for child well-being (“Child Poverty in Perspective”). Media commentary uses the most newsworthy nuggets of such reports to paint a picture of children who are marketed to, hemmed in, unhealthy, unhappy, fearful, stressed and needy. Sue Palmer, author of the polemic *Toxic Childhood* (2006), also widely reported and commented upon within the media, describes children throughout the developed world as “battery-raised – cooped up in their homes, living virtual lives, or in the car, being transported from club to club” (62).

The conflict between an idealised, nostalgic view of childhood and this more threatening modern construction has become a recurring cultural and social preoccupation and proposes a series of oppositions – past versus present, urban versus rural, outdoor versus indoor, freedom versus supervision. Adults’ continuing affection for Ransome animates most clearly the indoor/outdoor opposition, and the outdoor child as imagined by Ransome is now deemed to be an endangered species. The indoors child, on the other hand, is regularly depicted

as enslaved to technology: psychologist Dr Tanya Byron's report, *Safer Children in a Digital World* (2008) encapsulated many of the contemporary concerns about the unequal balance between the time children spend playing inside, on 'screens', "compounded by a risk-averse culture where we are inclined to keep our children 'indoors' despite their developmental needs to socialise and take risks" (2).

This brings into question an interesting dichotomy: whilst adults remember with fondness their own childhood freedom, there are clearly obstacles, whether material or ideological, that render it problematic to allow children the same experiences that are valued so highly in retrospect. In recent years there have been attempts to coax the indoor child outside. In a conscious effort to recapture the innocent outdoor pleasures that are felt to have been lost, there has been a raft of initiatives designed to give children access to nature and outdoor play. The National Trust's "50 things to do before you're 11  $\frac{3}{4}$ " campaign encourages adult carers to let children "feel the wind in their hair, smell food cooking on an open fire, track wild animals and eat a juicy apple straight from the tree" (n. pag.). However, there is an artificiality inherent within some of these initiatives. For example, a report by Stuart Lester and Martin Maudsley for Play England describes how exposure to nature can support children's development: "The diverse, dynamic and flexible features that can be found in natural spaces afford opportunities for extensive intentional play behaviours" (7). Anything concerned with "intentional play behaviours" suggests a more prescriptive approach to outdoor experiences than the nostalgic idyll of children roaming free. Even the National Trust's "50 things" initiative smacks of another set of targets to be achieved, with the accompanying risk of failure and feelings of inadequacy if not completed. If nature is sanitised, neatly packaged and presented to children as another learning activity it may well have educational and developmental benefits, but it does not represent freedom. Lester and Maudsley observe that:

Whilst children do not necessarily differentiate between natural and artificial elements in their play, predominantly natural outdoor settings are more likely to be perceived by children as free from adult agendas and thus more open to the possibilities of play. (7)

The significant word here is 'perceived': there appears to be no expectation that these natural settings actually *will* be free from adult agendas, simply that they *appear* to be free. As natural environments are increasingly served up in safe family-sized portions – for example, tourist attraction farm-parks and holiday

complexes such as Center Parcs – there is still a resistance to allowing children the freedom to choose their own approach to the outdoor environment outside the context of adult intervention. Freedom, it seems, is a commodity to be packaged up and dispensed (by adults) in controlled doses. But who are these initiatives ultimately for? Are they simply schemes created by adults for adults in order to recreate some idealised memory whilst ensuring that modern children are not allowed to run dangerously wild?

Similar questions could also be asked of the *Swallows and Amazons* film: is it really a film primarily for children? It is perhaps ironic that a key reason for its perceived appeal is its sense of jeopardy. As Jessica Hynes, one of the film’s star actors, explains:

I think children are captivated by the idea of taking a boat out on a lake for several days, with no grown-ups and only a tent and a tin of biscuits to protect and sustain them. It feels like real adventure, not virtual or chaperoned. (qtd. in McLean, n. pag.)

Of course, this begs another question: is it only children who are captivated by this idea of freedom, or are adults too? It could be argued that if the contemporary child’s life is as circumscribed as commonly perceived, then the idea of being allowed to set off on her own with a tent and basic provisions must surely seem as much a fantasy as Hogwarts or Narnia. But are adults any more likely to have had such adventures? Is it rather that, when they read the stories as children, it seemed to be a less outlandish prospect? Even if they were not actually sailing that boat themselves during their childhood, it was believable that there might be children out there somewhere living this very life, and so the memory of how they imagined those other children’s adventures is retained.

#### **4 A COMPARISON OF FILM AND BOOK - FOR ADULTS OR CHILDREN?**

Certainly, for the adults involved in the making of the *Swallows and Amazons* film, memory plays an important part in their interpretation of the text. The film’s actors are an example of such adult attitudes towards Ransome’s book, and its relationship to the film. In a behind-the-scenes interview with the actors, uploaded to YouTube to promote the film, Andrew Scott, playing one of the villains of the piece, observes that “[t]he first time I read the film I had an extraordinary

sense of childhood, and the magical nature of childhood and how things seem epic and huge and how a summer can seem like it goes on for years". Jessica Hynes, who plays Mrs Walker, the children's mother, feels that the story is about "being a child and having real freedom to go and do whatever you want to do in the wilderness, and I always enjoyed any chance I got to do that. This is the sort of dream really... the sort of fantasy of that is what this book is about". Rafe Spall, as Captain Flint, agrees, believing that the film allows viewers the chance to get "plugged into another world, a world that's gone now, that doesn't exist anymore, a world before health and safety" ('Swallows and Amazons – Behind the scenes interview' (n. pag.)). The tone is consistently elegiac, nostalgic and idealistic; Spall's comments convey the opinion that modern childhood experiences are lacking in comparison, and that they are sanitised and joyless. The film's director, Philippa Lowthorpe, summarising her approach to the adaptation, implies that it is the current generation of parents who are to blame:

What made me really want to do this film was this challenge to ourselves now about how we bring up our kids and the fact that we tend to wrap them up in cotton wool and they're always on laptops and computers.[...] I think it was wanting to send a message from the past to the present about how we bring up our children and to make us aware of another way to enjoy ourselves, out in the open.[...] I think it brings a wonderful sense of freedom and adventure. ('Swallows and Amazons – Behind the scenes interview' n. pag.)

Despite these good intentions, however, the film's finished form betrays a certain lack of trust in the book's ability to capture a young modern audience's attention. The most obvious difference between the book and the film is the insertion of a spy plot, loosely based on Ransome's previous exploits as a journalist and MI6 agent in Russia during the revolution, recounted in Hugh Brogan's 1984 biography of Ransome. This suggests that the adult creators of the film believe that, for modern children, simply watching other children "messaging about in boats" (12) – to borrow a phrase from another nostalgic classic, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* – is not enough. An interview with Andrea Gibb, the film's screenwriter, revealed the inherent tension between adult and child audiences:

As grown-ups we do have idyllic memories of particular summer holidays, of long walks when the sun was always shining, or that time you went fish-

ing. And yet you do need there to be a strong narrative drive in a film because kids nowadays are used to CGI and fast-moving images. (McLean n. pag.)

In one of the most telling scenes in the film – a scene that does not appear in the book – Mrs Walker, the children’s mother says of them: “I’m so glad they can come up here and do all the things I took for granted. They’re cooped up inside too much at home, it’s not good for them. I don’t want them frightened of the world.” (n. pag.). This statement encapsulates the film adaptation’s viewpoint; whilst it might be a subtext within the book, this belief in the importance of allowing children to experience physical freedom is at such a distance from contemporary culture’s construction of childhood that it is deemed appropriate and necessary to verbalise it more explicitly in the film.

Both the *Swallows and Amazons* film and the book are concerned with the transformative power of imagination, although the two versions use very different means to express this. The book opens with Roger, the youngest sibling, acting out an imaginary fantasy of sailing as he “tacks” down the field towards his mother (11). In the film, this opening sequence is transferred indoors, and depicts Roger playing with toy boats in the bath and acting out a pirate story. Whilst the characters in both the book and the film create imaginary adventures with the countryside as a backdrop to their fantasy, the film’s spy plot becomes a more visual and tangible representation of the imaginative adventure narratives that are created by the children in the book.

This injection of extra excitement might be the film’s most obvious departure from the book, but what is even more significant is the change in portrayals of children and adults, and the way in which they relate to each other. In order to contrast these differences I have conducted an analysis of the breakdown of scenes in both book and film. For the purposes of this analysis, I defined a scene in the book as either a descriptive passage or an exchange of dialogue in an uninterrupted specific setting; in the film, a scene is delineated by action which takes place in a single location and over continuous time. This analysis reveals that whereas in the book, 79% of scenes feature children on their own, this accounts for only 47% of scenes in the film. Particularly significantly, in support of my hypothesis that the film is designed to appeal as much to adults as to children, only one scene in the book involves an adult and no children (a description of Captain Flint on his boat), whereas such scenes make up 26% of the film’s action. Although many of these scenes depict the unfolding spy plot and interactions

between Captain Flint and the two Russian agents, there are also a number of scenes which feature dialogue between Mrs Walker and the family's landlady, Mrs Jackson (in a greatly extended role), during which they discuss the children's activities, and the amount of trust and freedom that they can be given.

Whereas it was largely taken for granted in the book that the children were broadly competent and capable of managing most situations – a view summarised by the famous telegram from the children's father: "BETTER DROWNED THAN DUFFERS IF NOT DUFFERS WON'T DROWN" – the narrative of the film displays rather less trust in their capabilities (15). The precious basket of food is lost overboard within minutes of setting sail; John is unable to untie a knot and has to cut the rope instead; and Roger falls out of the boat. Unlike the almost saintly harmony of the book's siblings, there is rather a lot of bickering. Even Susan, the stand-in mother of the book, who enabled the other children to go off and have adventures because she was there to maintain maternal standards and keep them fed, is more fallible here; rather than producing beautifully cooked "shark steaks" she prods cautiously at an unappetisingly immolated fish carcass before retreating to the relative safety of a tin of corned beef, named "pem-mican" by the children in order to elevate its status to a foodstuff more in keeping with their sea-faring fantasy (330).

The reduction in child-only scenes in the film, and the children's general lack of practical skills, might initially imply that these children are less able to function without adults than their literary counterparts. In the book, however, far from being left to fend for themselves, the child characters are in fact very much overseen by adults, albeit from a respectable distance. Ransome creates a network of farmers and their wives, and other "natives" – the name given by the children to the inhabitants of the local area – to keep a watchful eye on them. For example, by organising for the children to collect their morning milk from a nearby farm: "Mother knew that the Dixons would let her know at once if no one had come up from the island with the milk-can" (252). The film illuminates a more significant difference, which is more reflective of our construction of modern society – that is, the retracting of this social network of kindly adults and communal responsibility that allowed children the opportunity to venture beyond their family spaces and the immediate supervision of their parents in the knowledge that other adults would step into the role of observers and protectors. Mary Anne Stokes's 2006 article on parental fears and perception of risk links the concept of 'stranger danger' – a key component of children's personal safety education in schools over the last thirty years, reinforced in the media by high-

profile child-abduction cases – with a growing reluctance to place trust in a wider community of adults (8). Within this atmosphere of fear and distrust, it is unsurprising that the intervention of adults – if indeed it ever occurred – might not necessarily be welcomed, or thought entirely appropriate.

## 5 THE ROLE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN COMPLICATING MEMORY AND NOSTALGIA

Ransome's work can be positioned within the collection of classics that Judith Armstrong describes as "books that the culture itself has carried forward, common currency, literary milestones, not left behind in the same way as most children's books" (251). Julian Lovelock believes that what sets Ransome apart from his contemporaries is "his ability to create a world of childhood escape which is so close to reality that it is utterly believable" (15). Whilst it is tempting to read Ransome's fiction as a practical retelling of the 'real' lived lives of children in the 1930s, transformed through the passing of time into an unreachable work of fantasy, it is important to acknowledge that, even during the period in which he was writing, there were those who disputed his portrayal of childhood. A letter from a librarian, written to *The Spectator* magazine in 1943 questioned whether "Mr Ransome's stories appeal to children who live entirely outside the world of nannies, cooks and private boat-houses? Or may the line between Ransome readers and non-readers be drawn between town and country minded children...?" (*Signalling to Mars* 303). Ransome refuted this accusation quite fervently, claiming that his child characters were drawn from a range of backgrounds:

I should be very sorry indeed to think that only children of one particular background can share the fun of open air doings, and the feelings that have been common to all young human beings from the beginning of time (*Signalling to Mars* 303).

Ransome's response implies that he is conflating the background of his protagonists with that of his readers. The fact that the child characters in the book are from comfortably off, white, middle class backgrounds, suggests therefore that his intended readers, the children he describes as 'sharing the fun of open air doings' are from a narrower socio-cultural background than he might admit to or, possibly, realise. This disconnect illuminates the difficulties inherent in disen-

tangling the strands of fiction and reality that combine to create narrative. I would suggest, however, that the landscape of memory, in which children roamed free and unencumbered by adult concerns or oversight, is perhaps more vivid in imagination than in lived experience. Clearly, for the current generation of adults buying *Swallows and Amazons* – book or DVD – for children, their direct experience will not necessarily be of this level of freedom or connection with the rural landscape; their memories might come from their own parents, who may have been the first generation to read Ransome as children. Or, alternatively, regardless of generation or age, these adult readers or viewers might never have had experiences in the countryside; might, as Malcolm Muggeridge suggested back in 1930, “have not been so fortunate as to have a lake and a boat and an island but only a backyard amongst the semis of Suburbia” (*The Manchester Guardian* n. pag.). For these readers, the memory of their first experience of the book, is of how it made them feel. An example of this is given by Francis Spufford in his 2002 memoir of childhood reading, *The Child that Books Built*. For him, Ransome’s books were “idylls of meticulous detail, instructive about semaphore and surveying and gold-refining’, which allowed him to ‘try on a counter-life for size’” (81). Such memories of reading are just as important and tangible as first-hand experience of building a camp beyond adult supervision.

Julia Eccleshare, children’s book critic, also believes that fiction for children impacts on cultural memory, positing in 2013 that, “beyond the individual and collective facts, stories about childhood in books are handed down as blueprints of collective behaviour” (n. pag.). She suggests that the popularity of fiction such as that of Blyton and Ransome offered children the opportunity to vicariously experience “adventures in the countryside which were probably just as out of reach in reality as a term at Hogwarts is to today’s children” (n. pag.). She also suggests that memories might be influenced by the stories that were enjoyed as children:

These tales came to epitomise childhood of the time. When asked about their childhood many think they spent a lot of time outdoors and without adult supervision. But did they really? It may be that they just identified too much with the children they read about. (n. pag.)

Even those readers – adult or child – who live or lived in the countryside might not necessarily recognise Ransome’s fictional version of it. As Owain Jones observes:

Most of the iconic accounts of rural childhood are from earlier in the twentieth century or even from the late nineteenth century, so there is an inevitable lag between the images which emerge and are sustained by such accounts and the reality of children's lives in contemporary agricultural landscapes. (166)

Jones suggests that if “the countryside (and children in it) is seen through a process of nostalgic remembrance, 'the material countryside' of today is seen blended with past 'material countrysides' which themselves are made imaginary through remembrance and idealisation” (175). Similarly, as the experience of modern childhood moves ever further from that of Ransome’s original readership, the books are read differently, as Lovelock explains: “as products of their era; not as dead period pieces, but as exciting and relevant adventures which propound a strong personal morality and a love of nature and outdoor life, turning to advantage their setting in an increasingly distant past” (16).

## 6 CONCLUSION

In this article I have used the example of *Swallows and Amazons* to attempt to disentangle the strands of imagination and nostalgic memory in order to reveal the complications that ensue when adults compare their own childhoods with their contemporary counterparts.

In the film, Mrs Walker, the children’s mother, reminisces that “I used to camp out for days when I was their age”. That this dialogue does not appear in the book suggests that the film is articulating a contemporary concern about children’s lack of opportunity for such freedom. In the book, the decision to let the children camp out on their own is not questioned once Mr Walker has given his famous support. Yet despite the film-makers’ urge to underline and foreground what was simply taken for granted in the book – that is, the freedom of children to go off on an adventure – there remains an implicit assumption that, for today’s children, this is simply not enough. As Philippa Lowthorpe comments:

You’ve got to have people feel that the children are relevant to them, and anything that was too fusty or old-fashioned would have got in the way of

that. We wanted people to feel like these kids could almost be having these adventures today. (qtd. in McLean n. pag.)

This confusion between idealised and actual modes of childhood encapsulates the difficulties inherent in pinning down an abstract concept such as freedom – whilst modern children are less physically free, they are growing up in a society that is far freer ideologically in terms of attitudes towards gender, sexuality, race and class than in Ransome’s era. It is equally problematic to determine definitively the extent to which adult memories of childhood freedom reflect true experience; even if this were possible, there is always the danger of generalisation, of overlooking the very different circumstances of individuals coming from hugely disparate social, cultural and geographical backgrounds. In examining this film adaptation of a book that is such a classic representation of idealised childhood freedom it is clear that, for some at least, this ideal is not something to be let go of easily. In the book, the *Swallows and Amazons* story ends when the children’s holiday ends; but, for the children, this is only a temporary pause – they will return to their adventures the following year, and:

‘Every year. For ever and ever,’ said Titty.

‘Aye,’ said Mrs Dixon, ‘we all think that when we’re young.’ (352)

The continuing popularity of *Swallows and Amazons*, in its various iterations, is testament to the adult impulse to return to childhood adventures ‘for ever and ever’. Despite the complicating factors of changing and problematising constructions of childhood, the ultimate power of memory and nostalgia works to facilitate this imaginative time travel.

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