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**ESCAPE FROM THE ESTATE
IN BRITISH AND RUSSIAN CHILDREN'S AND
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE
(second half of the 19th – early 20th century)***

Abstract. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries in English children's literature emerged a new kind of character, defined as "a naughty child". The writers, who had introduced this character, emphasized his merry adventures, eccentric acts, mischiefs and spoofs, presented now, in contrast with didactic literature of the 1800-1850s, with no negative intention. The edifying lesson was marginalised, and essential was the portrayal of feelings and experiences of a child, his hectic life, full of adventures and events. Thereby, many motifs of didactic literature were rethought, including motifs of punishment, listening, and escape. At the same time, the imaginary of the estate was transformed in children's literature: as idealized by the "sentimentalists" writers (J.H. Ewing, M.L. Molesworth), and developed in their writings as a benevolent Arcadia, the estate became a place of merry games and entertainment, in contrast with the city life and city dwelling as a prison behind dusty and high walls. At the same time, the estate as such, both the manor house and the surrounding lands, was modelled as a closed space perceived by the child as a prison from which he escapes. The cultivation of this motif benefits Richard Jefferies (1848–1887), Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894), Kenneth Grahame (1859–1932) and Beatrix Potter (1866–1943). Additionally, we try to identify similar motifs in the Russian literature of the period, tracing hypothetical overlaps.

Key words: estate; children's literature; escape; R. Jefferies; R.L. Stevenson; K. Grahame; B. Potter.

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**Побег из усадьбы в детской и автобиографической литературе
Великобритании и России (вторая половина XIX – начало XX в.)****

Аннотация. В конце XIX – начале XX в. в английской литературе развивается новый тип персонажа, известный как «непослушный ребенок» ("a naughty child"). В произведениях, героем которых он выступает, акцент делается на его веселых приключениях, выходках, проказах и играх, подаваемых теперь, в противовес дидактической литературе первой половины столетия, без однозначного знака «минус». Намного важнее назидательного урока для авторов становится

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изображение чувств, переживаний ребенка, его кипучей жизни, богатой на приключения и события. В данной связи получают переосмысление многие мотивы дидактической литературы – в том числе и мотив наказания, послушания и побега. В это же время в детской литературе переосмысливается и образ усадьбы: идеализированная авторами-“сентименталистами” (Дж.Х. Юинг, М.Л. Моулсуорт и др.) и выведенная в их сочинениях как благостная Аркадия, усадьба становится место веселых игр и развлечений ребенка, противопоставляется городу и городской квартире как тюрьме за пыльными и высокими стенами. Однако и сама усадьба – как господский дом, так и окружающие его уголья – может выступать как замкнутое пространство и восприниматься ребенком как тюрьма, из которой он совершает побег. Развитие этого мотива связано с именами Ричарда Джеффриса (1848–1887), Роберта Луиса Стивенсона (1850–1894), Кеннета Грэма (1859–1932) и Беатрис Поттер (1866–1943). В качестве дополнительной задачи мы пробуем выявить аналогичные мотивы, встречающиеся в русской литературе периода, и проследить возможные переключки.

Ключевые слова: усадьба; детская литература; побег; Р. Джеффрис; Р.Л. Стивенсон; К. Грэм; Б. Поттер.

Despite the fact that the theme of escape is primordial in the world literature [for more details, see: Heilman 1975], its intentional shaping dates back to the end of the 18th – the beginning of the 19th century, associated with the era of Romanticism. (Many articles and studies on the question; see, in particular, the collective research: [Темница и свобода / Dungeon and Freedom 2002].) The nature of such escape is evident from the word semantic field. It is associated with a move (usually hasty) from one place to another, first is considered by the “fugitive” as a prison, and the second as an area of freedom; the one is associated with liberty, breathing, creativity, life, and the other with fetters, wordlessness, coffin, and, finally, death. Hence, the escape demands two opposite spaces; one of the most useful oppositions in this context is the “city – village”. Going back to antiquity (the topos “beatus ille”, decorated in the poems of Horace, where the serene rural life played contrast to the bustle and hypocrisy of the city), it remains in literature to the present day. But the reputations of the city and the estate have been changing over the centuries. The city in its negative aspect was depicted as a dusty dungeon behind high walls, a cellar, a blazing hell with “satanic mills” (W. Blake), inhabited by real demons (Th. Carlyle) and devil machines (E. Henley), a place of “broil, sin and din”, “a damned <...> money-mart” (E. Radford) and a coffin (A. Huxley; see: Рабинович / Rabinovich 2016]. Estate in its negative image was painted as a provincial swamp, a land of sloth with the inevitable “suburban tedium of clapboard villas” – and also as a coffin and a crypt.

However, in children’s literature of Great Britain of the late 19th – the early 20th centuries, the conception of the estate was less controversial. Children’s literature of the period was under strong impact of romanticism, condemning ruthless urbanization, as we see from the poems by W. Wordsworth, W. Blake, as well as in the statement of the pre-romanticist W. Cooper: “God made the



country, and man made the town” (The Task. Bk I, ln 749). In the 1850–1900-s several influencing groups were established, as critics of urbanization and advocats of rural life; among them were the Pre-Raphaelites, the adepts of William Morris, and also the “ruralists”, to which Richard Jefferies belonged.

At the same time, children’s literature of the period showed other tendencies. It broke with strict didactics of the 1800–1850-s, and in the 1860s–1870s developed a kind of “sentimentalism”: with the growing interest and attention to the feelings of a child, his/her perception, and specific vision of the world [see particularly: Carpenter 1985, 104]. Taking from the poetry of the “lake romantics” (W. Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality...”, S.T. Coleridge’s “The Midnight Frost” *et al.*), writers of the period started to imagine childhood as a particular period of life, “state of being set apart, a time of special perceptions” [Carpenter 1985, 105], and as a sort of L. Carroll’s “bright summer day”. A trend of children’s “sentimentalism” was represented in the works by Juliana Horatia Ewing (“Mrs Otherway’s Remembrances”, 1869, “A Flat Iron for a Farthing”, 1873), Mary Louisa Molesworth (“Carrots: Just a Little Boy”, 1876) and others. Childhood in this period was much more associated with the happy Arcadia: a sinless land, the golden age of humankind, passing in the bosom of nature, at the parental estate (which, in its turn, was also linked with the image of Arcadia even since the 17th century, the time of English Renaissance [see: Pohl 2003, 224]). The same motif was produced in autobiographical literature of the period, where the estate was perceived as the “Paradise lost”, associated with the eternally irrevocable childhood. As H. Carpenter justly remarks, “search for Arcadia <...> was no doubt partly motivated by the desire to return <...> ‘that peaceful past time of childhood’” [Carpenter 1985, 149].

But, as we remember, “et in Arcadia ego” (death). The writers who invented the “golden kingdoms” of childhood clearly mentioned this formula from the painting by Claude Poussin (and K. Grahame even quoted it in his “Prologue” to “The Golden Age” [Grahame 1895, 8]). Childhood is an Arcadia and a paradise, but however, as the biblical Eden, it has its own limitations; there are prescriptions and prohibitions, and, finally, there is a forbidden fruit, and as a result – the fact of temptation, fall and escape.

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One of the keywords of Victorian pedagogy was certainly the word “restriction” [for details see: Mintz 1983]. With allusion to the famous Victorian maxim “My home is my fortress”, we may say that the children’s room was the sanctuary within this fortress and similarly the dungeon, guarded most carefully, right down to the locked doors and metal bars on the windows. The desire to protect a child from external world, and above all from destructive external influences, was realized in constraining clothes, tight collars, the rules of decency and a strict regime to be observed. Life in such an atmosphere seemed to be a “pretentious over-furnished <...> life of the doll’s house” [Carpenter 1985, 148]. The children were usually entrusted to governess or nanny for the day; and the parental emotions in interactions with them were manifested quite



sparingly, bordering by now standards with insensitivity; sometimes a child had not seen his or her parents for days, remaining locked in the nursery (B. Potter's situation).

The child received relative freedom only when he/she arrived with his/her parents at the estate. Here he/she was allowed to walk alone, to play not under supervision in the garden or grove, to swim in the pond, and to visit his/her neighbors. Compared to the city with its "doll houses" and cramped dusty streets, the estate became a space of liberty, a place of fun, exploration and creativity, differing thus from the urban Victorian mansion "in which everything is for show rather than use" [Carpenter 1985, 148].

The motif "city as a prison" also manifested in the Russian children's literature. One of the brightest examples is "Petka at the Bungalow" ("*Petka na dache*", 1899) by Leonid Andreev, where the idyllic suburban world, represented in the lordly dacha near Tsaritsyno, was stunned with the news from the city. The hero's reaction when he hears about the demand of return is truly heartbreaking: "He [Petka] did not begin to cry, as town children, thin and half-starved, cry; he simply bawled louder than the strongest-voiced man; and began to roll on the ground, as the drunken women rolled on the boulevard" [Andreev 1916, 101]. We can also meet this motif in the autobiographical writings of the period; compare S.T. Aksakov's recollection in "Years of Childhood" ("*Detskiye gody Bagrova-vnuka*"; 1858; modern translation – "Childhood Years of Bagrov Grandson") about the first visit from Ufa to the Bagrovo estate: "Three years before, on the journey <...>, from the town to the country, I was like an *escaped prisoner*" [Aksakov 1916, 262, italics are mine].

* * *

In the 1880s, a new type of character appeared in children's literature, "a naughty child". The means for the appearance of such a type were not only literary frames, but also the biographical outline. All the writers under discussion, Richard Jefferies, Kenneth Grahame and Beatrix Potter, were of those people who "have used their talent and creativity to break free from the prison of their childhood" [Miller 1997, 132]. Turning to their biographies, we see that they shared love for country life, for the estate where they spent their childhood, as well as the motif of escape.

Richard Jeffries grew up on his father's farm, on the shores of Coate Water, at the foot of Marlborough Downs, "a true Arcadia fringed with marshland" [Carpenter 1985, 110]. According to the biographers, "he was adventurous beyond any norm, and the story is told that he and his cousin, when in their teens, ran away to France, vaguely hoping to get as far as Moscow" [Carpenter 1985, 110].

Kenneth Grahame's childhood (starting at the age of 4, after the death of his mother) passed in his Granny's house – the Mount cottage in Berkshire, on the banks of the Thames, in view of the gentle hills of the Downs. Escape from London was a leitmotif in his early essays ("Rural Pan", "Autumn Encounter", etc.); later this thirst for wandering remained in the children's dilogy set in the



village, and in his *magnum opus*, tale “The Wind in the Willows” (1908), where the heroes live in English Arcadia, on the picturesque River Bank.

Beatrix Potter’s childhood passed in the town mansion (“my unloved birthplace” [Lane 1946, 89], as she called it), where “she spent most of her time in her nursery, on the third floor <...> while her parents often entertained away from home” [De Wilde 2008, 16]. However, for summer, they took her to Camfield Place, paternal grandmother’s country house in Hertfordshire, «a perfect whole, where all things are a part» [Carpenter 1985, 113]. Escape is one of the central themes of B. Potter’s later work. First appearing in her early stories (“The Tale of Peter Rabbit”, 1902; “The Tale of Benjamin Bunny”, 1904), it develops in the later ones, peaked in “The Tale of Rigling Bland” (1913) [see: Lane 1946, 116–117].

In 1881–1882 Richard Jeffries, that time a famous ruralist writer, whose essays were widely read in England (being popular until the beginning of the 20th century) published the novels “Wood Magic” and “Bevis: Story of a Boy”. In general, these novels shaped a dilogy united by a boy named Bevis (in honor of Sir Bevis of Hampton, the hero of chivalric novels and popular books) as a protagonist and, according to H. Carpenter, containing “the germ of the great Edwardian children’s narratives” [Carpenter 1985, 109]. Bevis is a boy of 5–6 (in “Wood Magic”) or 9–10 (in “Bevis”) years, the naughty little adventurer, who lives on his father’s farm, unfamiliar with the world outside. Both novels tell about his games and adventures in his father’s farm and neighborhood. However, if in “Wood Magic” the focus has been shifted to the magical forest and its inhabitants, talking animals, rivaling, warring, weaving intrigues, and Bevis’s adventures were almost not described, then in the sequel of 1882 Bevis is already presented as an active character, “an enormous step forward from the saccharine ‘Beautiful Child’ writings” [Carpenter 1985, 112]. The novel is dedicated to the adventures of Bevis and his friend Mark: boys build a raft, float down the river, dig a canal, explore new lands. However, their adventures are rather monotonous; many readers have noted that the novel is unreadable as a whole, and H. Carpenter compares the main heroes with Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, complaining that the “Bevis” would be a masterpiece if it were much shorter [see: Carpenter 1985, 113].

Kenneth Graham’s dilogy “The Golden Age” (1895) and “Dream Days” (1898) also had location outside the city, in a village manor house, and the heroes were the young storyteller and his brothers and sisters; but they are completely different children from that in the novels by Miss Ewing and Miss Molesworth. In these short stories “the naughty child” finally gets fully embodied. Subtle girls with moralizing behaviour and boys in sailor suits “a-la Lord Fauntleroy” are replaced with an active child, normally a boy, less often a girl with a “boyish twinkle in her eyes”. The focus in these stories is made on adventures and fantasies, and the ebullient life of a child, playing and creating under the shadows of the parental estate is brought to the fore.

Schematically, the space of the estate in children’s literature is assembled as several circles of different diameters into each other. The smallest of them is a



nursery (where, by the case, a child may be “imprisoned” for a time). The circle slightly wider is the manor house, with its storage rooms, attics, closets *et al.* The third circle is the space around the estate: a courtyard with outbuildings, a stockyard, a garden, fields stretching around to the horizon, a far-away forest, *etc.* Finally, the fourth circle, the widest and with blurred edges, is the space outside the estate – the most alluring and mysterious. Consequently, escape from the estate in children’s literature was linked with moving from one of these spaces (“circles”) to another. (In children’s literature, the motif of escape has already been considered [see: Веселова / Veselova 1998], but the escape from the estate as a particular program is analyzed here for the first time.)

The children’s room, the smallest of the named “circles”, can become a “prison” in two cases: if (1) the child is sick or (2) is punished for offense.

The motif of illness is more widespread in the autobiographical literature. Forced to sit locked up on a sunny day, the child feels like a captive: the room turns a prison for him, and the alluring sunny day as an unattainable freedom. Compare, e.g., in S.T. Aksakov’s “Years of Childhood”: “<...> I somehow caught a chill, which led me to a cold and cough, so that I was forced to stay shut up in the house, which to me seemed as *tedious a prison* as any I had read on in my books” [Aksakov 1916, 223; italics are mine]. However, confinement usually becomes a catalyst that activates fantasy and eccentric creativity. The child resigns to “imprisonment” and occupies various kinds of games (like in Stevenson’s poem “The Land of Counterpane”: the blanket is imagined as a snow-covered plain, the bent child’s knees as high hills and mountains, and so forth). The motif of escape in this case, reasonably, is extremely rare and relevant only in allegorical works (as Tom’s escape in chapter II of “The Water Babies” by Ch. Kingsley, ending with death, “change of life” – and his rebirth into a water baby).

Normative was the plot when a punished child escapes from a locked room. If in the didactic literature of the beginning of the 19th century punishment was conceptualized as just compensation, in the 1880s it was progressively associated with the motif of disobedience. Children escape from their room, conceiving it as a “dungeon”; they slip through the window, scramble up the gutter and over the roof, or by means of a “rope”, woven from sheets. Take, for example, the following episode from “The Golden Age”: “<...> when Harold was locked up in his room all day, for assault and battery upon a neighbor’s pig <...> he had very soon escaped by the window <...>, and had only gone back in time for his release <...>” [Grahame 1895, 8].

However, this escape and the following adventures must turn out to be a game on the territory of paternal estate. Having escaped from home, the child wanders for some time, enjoying freedom, but necessary returns before dinner. The essence of such escape is reflected in R.L. Stevenson’s poem “The Keepsake Mill” (from “A Child’s Garden of Verse”, 1885). Having escaped from home and crawled through the loophole in the hedge, the narrator and his companion found themselves in the world out of the estate: “Marvellous places, *though handy to home!*” [Stevenson 1885, 30; italics are mine]. It is quite important



that the adventure is not far from home. It is also significant that the emotional code of the “Keepsake Mill” is the children’s dream of how they, after having adventures in far countries, will finally return to the estate: “Home from the Indies and home from the ocean, / Heroes and soldiers we all shall come home” [Stevenson 1885, 31].

The third “circle”, i.e. the territory of the estate, is much more larger than the world of an apartment or a city mansion, but yet it is limited. However, the characters rarely cross this invisible border. It is seen, for example, in the story “Alarums and Excursions” (“The Golden Age”), where the narrator and his brother Harold, running after the soldiers, pass the outskirts, leave the village, and, walking in the empty unknown fields, go astray [see: Grahame 1895, 44–45]. All ends well: the village doctor picks up the narrator and his crying little brother and takes them home in his gig.

So, as we see, the world turns out to be reduced to the estate. What is outside is portrayed either as hostile and gloomy (it is remarkable that the railway in the southern part of the map goes to “To the Dreary World”), or even completely non-existent, “without form” (“*bezvidny*”) in the biblical sense. This space is hazardous and in all the senses forbidden.

* * *

Having classified the world of the estate, with its “permitted” and “forbidden” spaces, we did not mention one more space, unattainable, unknown, and, in some way, “transcendent”. The description of it is comprehensively given by K. Grahame, in the dialogue between Mole and Water Rat in chapter I of “The Wind in the Willows”:

“And beyond the Wild Wood again?” <...> asked [the Mole]; “where it’s *all blue and dim*, and one sees *what may be hills* or perhaps they mayn’t, and *something like the smoke of towns, or is it only cloud-drift?*”

“Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World,” said the Rat. “<...>. I’ve never been there, and I’m never going, nor you either, if you’ve got any sense at all”. [Grahame 1908, 12; italics are mine]

An obscure space, “where it’s all blue and dim”, is a cross-cutting image in children’s and autobiographical literature of the period. Turning again to the map of “The Golden Age”, we will see that its northern edge is marked by the horizon line: a contoured forest, hills, and above them bushy clouds. This alluring space is known as “Far-far-away” (in English tradition, the name of a magical country, similar to the Russian Far-Away Kingdom (*Tridesyatoye tsarstvo*)) – thanks to the poem of the same name by Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892), where this space with its imperious call was metaphor for spiritual experience. Something not understandable, marked by the horizon line or the object that forms it (forest, river, blue air, hills or the smoke of factory chimneys, merging with floating clouds); often one can hear ringing bells there calling child (“The Water Babies”) – “the mellow ‘lin-lan-lone’ of the evening bells”. The call becomes



an irresistible temptation, where the fabulous is perplexed with the mysterious, forbidden, and even sinful.

Most often this mysterious enticing space near the horizon is outlined by distant blue hills: a principal element of the English scenery, the classic landscape of Berkshire (the cradle of British children's literature), as well as Dartmoor, southern Scotland *et al.* The image of such hills present in "The Wind in the Willows" (ch. IX), where the Water Rat begins to pine away with a thirst for wandering, realized as the Call of the South. "On this side of the hills was now the real blank, on the other lay the crowded and coloured panorama that his inner eye was seeing so clearly" [Grahame 1908, 196]. The Water Rat cannot resist this, and almost starts to move and welcome, but finally, saved by the Mole, finds a way out in creative work and poetry.

Another common place in describing these distances is their blue color. In English stories we usually watch blue hills, in the Russian autobiographical literature – a blue forest. Mention, for example, in "Childhood" ("*Detstvo*", 1852) by Leo Tolstoy: "The immeasurable yellow field was closed in only one side by a tall, bluish forest which then appeared to me as a most distant and mysterious place, beyond which the other world came to an end, or uninhabitable countries began" [Tolstoy 1904, 28].

The image of inviting hills is also present in the B. Potter's "The Tale of the Pigling Bland" (1913), the only story in which the character *actually* escapes from the estate. Pigling Bland, little piglet, together with his brother Alexander, goes to the market, leaving his native farm. The mother of the piglets, Aunt Pettitoes, and the owner of the farm (the storyteller) "equip" them for the journey. Here we can see the classic Victorian "restrictions", codified in careful brushing and washing ("We brushed their coats, we curled their tails and washed their little faces <...>" [Potter 1913, 17]), in the instructive warnings ("Mind your Sunday clothes, and remember to blow your nose" [Potter 1913, 17–18]), and even in documents for piglets ("licenses"). The loss of the documents is the leitmotif of the story, and the manner to preserve them until the required minute is the way to growing up.

Another leitmotif of the story is the image of the far-away hills, now shrouded in haze, now flooded with sunlight. By the way, this is the only story in which the distance to this loci is explicit ("Over the Hills, 4 miles"), and it turns out to be shorter than to the city where the piglets are heading. The hills beckon the Pigling Bland; this moment is accented on the cover of the book: it depicts a piglet, dreamingly looking at the column with the inscription "Over the Hills". The idea of "calling hills" takes its final phrase in the song "Tom, Tom the Piper's son..." that runs as a refrain through the story: "And they all ran to hear him play, / *Over the hills and far away!*" [Potter 1913, 54; italics are mine].

Several times the piglet resists the call – but eventually yields to it and rushes towards the hills together with his friend Pig-Wig. He bypasses the "border guards", Policeman, Farmer, Greengrocer, Plowman, and crosses the bridge and the river below (a classic image of the border between two worlds).



And by this scene the story ends: “They [Pigling Bland and Pig-Wig] came to the river, they came to the bridge <...>, then over the hills and far away she danced with Pigling Bland!” [Potter 1913, 93–94].

The piglet does not return home (compare the narrator’s words from the beginning of the story: “<...> if you once cross the county boundary you cannot come back” [Potter 1913, 21]). The documents saved by the piglet and the habit to deceive (Pigling Bland pretends to be lame and old) become for him the instrument to growing up, and his native farm forever remains for him beyond the horizon, on the other side of the blue hills.

At the end of the 1910s, the topic of escape from the estate ran low. In the modernist era, the city became the main location for the children’s books, and gunshots and bombs of the First World War destroyed the happy Arcadia. Interest in the estate theme still revives in the children’s literature in the 1950s, due to the further urbanization and the destruction of many old noble nests (cf. the novels “Tom’s Midnight Garden” (1958) by Ph. Pierce, “Green Noah” series (1954–1976) by L.M. Boston). However, the estate appears there as something already non-existent, forever lost, as a fragment of the old world, in no sense associated with the motif of escape [see: Hall 2003, 154–157].

Now it is obvious, that the escape from estate varies in plot and essence, from fantasy and scenic hoax to the metaphor of growing up; the latter, however, is demonstrated only in few cases. In general, the literature of the time is marked by a child’s stay within the boundaries, and the alluring distances remain for him/her a forbidden fruit, tantalizing but unattainable. The estate is still perceived as a blessed Paradise, a happy Arcadia, and escape from it often appears as a fun as there are many in this sun-shined and still carefree world.

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