

John Wyndham and "the Searing Anguishes of Childhood": From "Fairy Story" to *Chocky*

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■ In Britain John Wyndham remains the best known and arguably the most important author (English or otherwise) of science fiction after H. G. Wells, on whose approach he modeled such well-known works as *The Day of the Triffids* (1951). It is, consequently, surprising that he has been almost completely overlooked in terms of both critical and biographical investigation. And, as it happens, what particularly merits exploration in Wyndham's case are the reflections of his life in his fiction. Without doubt, the most autobiographically influenced of—to use the roll call of his full name—John ("Jack") Wyndham Parkes Lucas Beynon Harris's novels are *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957) and *Chocky* (1968). The autobiographical dimension is sufficiently continuous and important that both works might be described as examples of "estranged autobiography."¹

Given this link, it may very well not just be coincidental that Harris's wife, Grace (probably following his wishes), willed proof copies of both novels to the library at Bedales, his beloved, pioneering, coeducational school. According to the first codicil of her will, dated December 4, 1985, "I GIVE such of the books set out on the list dated the same day as my Will [October 23, 1985] to Bedales School on the terms of Clause 3(c) of my Will." The list is of the first editions of Harris's books. Only in the case of *The Midwich Cuckoos* "(Ring bound proof copy with enclosures)" and *Chocky* "(Proof copy)" are the proofs included.² This provision, I suspect, reflects the fact that Harris himself viewed these two novels as his most autobiographical if not, in the case of *Chocky*, among his best.

Chocky (1968) and the shorter *Amazing Stories* and *Good Housekeeping* version (1963) were both published after *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957) but there is good reason to believe that the conception of "Chocky" (or at least something

like it) predates that of *The Midwich Cuckoos* by a good many years. Marion Tess Barker (now Sister Bede), the daughter of Harris's best friend, Harry ("Biff") Barker, of Row Cottage, in Steep, Hampshire (the location of Bedales), with whom Harris regularly stayed, believes that "Chocky" "was an *early* work re-touched; but refused publication until Jack's reputation was established."³ On the basis of debatable internal and biographical evidence, Sister Bede plumps for a possible first version composition date of 1949-50 (in between *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Kraken Awakes*). It should be stressed that there is no surviving manuscript evidence to support this conjecture. The earliest surviving manuscript is the holograph manuscript for the 1963 magazine publications.

But the case for understanding "Chocky" as the fruit of a much earlier conception does not depend upon the existence of early manuscripts. In the context of Harris's entire fictional oeuvre, it is apparent that the SF story of "Chocky" and *Chocky* are the culmination of a sequence of related fictions involving a child's (in three cases) or young adult's (in one case) other-worldly communications, which go back to the early 1930s. They were preceded by an unfinished short fantasy piece entitled "Fairy Story" (possibly written in 1931), by the SF story "Frustrate Glimpse," revised as "Child of Power" (*Fantasy*, 1939), and by the fantasy "But a Kind of Ghost" (*Tales of the Frightened*, 1957; likely written in 1951). I shall analyze the biographical implications of these stories and of the two versions of Chocky's narrative which they presaged.

"Fairy Story" (1931): The Wicked (?) Father According to Bertram Rota's original listing of the Wyndham Archive (see note 2 below), "Fairy Story" was in a "Folder of 8 uncollected, apparently unpublished early 'supernatural' stories. . . . The earliest(?) story is dated 1931." The other stories are in typescript form, whether ribbon or carbon. But "Fairy Story" is an incomplete nine-page holograph manuscript. The central character, a young child named Priscilla, the daughter of the unhappily married Martin and Jane, is, at the tale's opening, discovered by her father in her nursery playing with her toy theatre. But there are no actors on the toy stage: "They'd just get in the way" of "'The Fairies. They want all that room to dance,' she explained."⁴ The prettiest fairy she calls "Tissy" (short for "Tissifny"). Martin sets up the stage with toy figures for the play-within-a-play scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—the performance of Pyramus and Thisbe. In the background, he places the figure of Titania, "a make believe fairy" (4). Martin wishes to instill in his child a rational sense that fairies are *not real*. But Priscilla will not have it: "I think I like the real fairies better" (4).

In the story's next scene, Martin confronts his wife: "You've been stuffing that child's head full of nonsense again" (5). He is adamant that fantasy should not be confused with reality, and "Love" he understands Darwinistically as the "camouflaged life-force" (6). On being told about "Tissifny," Jane exclaims, "oh Tisiphone. But she wasn't a fairy, she was a fury" (6). She, of the three goddesses of vengeance, is the Avenger of Murder. On a number of occasions

Harris acknowledges the power of women, which he identifies with the "life force," by likening a woman to a Fury.⁵ "I won't have any child's mind debased like this," Martin protests. "You wanted a son," Jane replies (7).

In the third scene, which mirrors the first, Jane enters "Patricia's" (a mistake for "Priscilla's") nursery (8). Priscilla tells Jane that Tissy is real. At this point the story breaks off. The name error has psychological significance, since the notes for the story's development (which are on the balance of the last page) clearly indicate that Priscilla's identity has (for a time at least) been usurped by another's, by Tisiphone's:

Ogre captures Tissy, tears off wings etc.
Martin is killed by fall on stairs

Jane goes to break news to Priscilla. Finds her rejoicing. Tissy has escaped from Ogre. She fixed a string across castle stairs. Ogre tripped & was killed.

Jane goes to stairs. Attached to 4th bannister she finds a length of string which she unties

Obviously, the father, Martin, is the wicked Ogre, the would-be murderer of Tisiphone and her world of imagination. At the end of this fairy horror story (had it been completed) the reader is left to wonder whether Tisiphone is real or whether a disturbed Priscilla murdered her father.

It is tempting, and I believe appropriate, to map the events of this story onto the relationship between Harris and his mother and father, and their relationship with each other. John Harris and his brother Vivian were the children of George Beynon Harris and Gertrude Parkes Harris, the well-off daughter of a successful Birmingham iron-master. George Beynon Harris, a schoolteacher born in Port Eynon (hence his middle name), South Wales, became a barrister after his marriage, at his wife's urging that he achieve a professional career more in keeping with her social station.⁶ The marriage failed in 1911, when John Harris was eight years old. George and Gertrude separated. John and Vivian lived with their mother in a small house in Birmingham until 1915, and then in a succession of hotels and attended a succession of boarding schools. All touch was lost with their father and, when he was dying, Harris only found out about it because of a BBC SOS.⁷ The only public "John Wyndham" memorial, a 1990 National Trust plaque at Cwrt Farm to the west of Aberedaron in North Wales, bears the following inscription:

The National Trust is grateful for the financial assistance received towards the acquisition of Cwrt from the Countryside Commission, the World Wide Fund for Nature Conservation (with sponsorship from Office Supplies Ltd.), the Nature Conservatory Council, individual donors and a substantial legacy from Vivian Beynon Harris in memory of his brother (who wrote under the name of "John Wyndham"), Gertrude Harris, Grace Beynon Harris and Lila Mary Grettan.

The memorial exists because of a provision in Vivian's will; he had specified the names to be mentioned including that of his long-time partner Lila Grettan, and pointedly excluding their father, George Beynon Harris.⁸

The absent father motif is important to much of Harris's work.⁹ In "Fairy Story" the father's absence is attributable to his having been murdered by his own child. For Harris, his father's absence opened a breach, a gap in reality. What had been a comparatively cosy enclosed world was opened to a very different and alarming larger world. Not much is known about the reasons for the breakdown of the marriage. Vivian intimates that their father drank.¹⁰ But he was a well-educated man, the author of both a legal tome, *The Law of Tender* (1908), and a touching memoir entitled *When I Was a Boy* (1911) by the time of the separation. Although he published no further books, John and Vivian must both have inherited their writing ability from their father.

One can understand that the barrister side of George Harris might have wished to instill in his sons (one of whom, Vivian, became a RADA-trained actor) an understanding of the distinction between reality and fantasy. But George Harris the schoolteacher would not have denied the value of imagination. And nor does Martin, the father in Harris's story. After all, Martin has bought his daughter the toy theatre. Martin is familiar with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one of the more fantasy-oriented of Shakespeare's plays. He is able to contrast, for Priscilla's instruction, Titania, the fictional Fairy Queen in Shakespeare's play, with "Tissifny," the supposedly equally fictional pretty fairy in Priscilla's imagination. But the play-within-a-play portion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that Martin selects for enactment conveys a sense of realities within realities, the fairy world is as real as the human world in Shakespeare's play. Maybe Martin was not really such an Ogre, not really an example of the fairy-tale wicked father. I am suggesting, then, that Harris's attitude towards his absent, invisible father was deeply divided. But it is the more positive recollection and re-creation which comes increasingly to the fore in the series of fictions which may be understood as issuing from "Fairy Story" and leading to the *imaginary* creation of his ideal father.

"Frustrate Glimpse"/"Child of Power" (1938?/June 1939): The Ideal Replacement Father "Frustrate Glimpse" survives firstly as a mixed holograph and typescript manuscript of forty-one pages. The first and last pages are holograph, as are pages 34–38. Given that a revised version of this story entitled "Child of Power" was published in June 1939, I assume that 1938 was the composition date for "Frustrate Glimpse." The tale, "the affair of Ted Filler" who was not "just a freak," exists as a "Document addressed to his successor in practice by Dr Ronald Tribert, late of Irkwell, Derbyshire."¹¹ A deletion on page 40 indicates that the doctor was originally telling the story to a group of Americans (a clue to the likelihood that Harris had anticipated publication of this story in an American magazine). Harris revised this previous oral frame situation, with its immediacy of presentation, by discarding the opening and

closing pages of the typescript and replacing them with the two holograph pages which establish the document frame device. (The story's last line makes it important that documentary evidence of Dr. Tribert's account remains.) A forty-page ribbon typescript (and a carbon copy of same) of the mixed holograph and typescript manuscript also survive. The typescript is addressed to Harris's London agent, E[dward] J[ohn] Carnell.

The inadequate, not to say limited, father in this story is named Jim. In terms of influence, during the course of the narrative, he will be replaced by a kind of surrogate father, the much more knowledgeable and insightful Dr. Tribert. Jim works in the stone quarries (and presumably lives in a metaphoric stone age); his wife Ada, who is also uneducated, had worked in a mill. Their son, Ted, has a younger sister named Doreen (two other sisters died in infancy). Ted is a peculiar child. He will only stop howling if he sleeps "in an ordinary galvanized iron bath with a handle each end" (6). At age one he is able to hum the New World Symphony. When Ted is four, Jim sees Dr. Tribert because "I've 'eard 'im use words what I'm sure 'e ain't never 'eard from me and the missus" (9). When a radio doesn't work, it is Ted who points to a transformer problem. It turns out that he can hear radio waves. Having asked the doctor to come around, Jim gives a demonstration of Ted's ability to hear what is on the radio when the set is turned off. Now, instead of sleeping in the iron bath, Ted puts a tin box over his head at nights to muffle "looking" at the sounds of radio waves. Dr. Tribert finds two soft spots—without bone beneath—above Ted's temples: "The boy had a sixth sense, and of a kind I had never heard, read or dreamed of." Ted is "electro-sentient" (20). He can, for example, overhear telephone conversations. If the papers got the story, "it would be worse than that silly Quins business" (21), a reference to the sad case of the Dionne quintuplets who were born in Quebec, Canada, in 1934. The doctor's immediate solution is to make Ted a better screening device—"the eyelid of his new sense" (23).

When Ted is ten and a half years old, Dr. Tribert explains, "You see, Jim, all our most advanced electrical appliances seem quite primitive to him" (28). At age twelve, Ted tells his schoolteacher Mr. Pauley about life on other planets; he can communicate with alien life when the more powerful radio stations are off the air.¹² The *donnée* of "Chocky" is here directly presaged. Adopting an increasingly parental role, Dr. Tribert takes Ted to see an acquaintance at Leed's University for a specialist opinion. The doctor is becoming Ted's surrogate, truly understanding, ideal father, his guardian angel. (There is a parallel here with the surrogate father role that Harris played with the Barker daughters; Jim, it might be noted, lives in a "cottage" [35] like "Biff" Barker. Harris did not want to be a flawed real father like "Biff" or Jim.¹³) Finally, persuaded by the doctor, Jim agrees that Ted should go to university. But this plan, fathered by the doctor, is unexpectedly frustrated. A clap of thunder destroys Ted's special power. "Now he's a quarryman like his father." The story concludes with Dr. Tribert's advice to his successor: "If he marries keep a close watch on his children.

There's still just the possibility . . ." (41). In influencing his successor (his professional "offspring"), Dr. Tribert (after his death?) might also be able to influence Ted's successor (and the doctor's surrogate grandchild). One can see now why Harris replaced the oral frame with the more permanent document form.

The overall revision, titled at one point "Sixth Sense," was published in the third issue of *Fantasy* (June 1939) under the title "Child of Power" (selected from alternative Harris-proposed possibilities by *Fantasy's* founder-editor Walter Gillings) as by Wyndham Parkes. "Child of Power" is an expansion divided into six "chapters," and once more the frame situation is changed. In the first chapter, "Of Mice and Men," "a chance-met group" in a pub in the Lake District (including an unnamed narrator) are discussing "the future of man," including the possibility of evolutionary jumps.¹⁴ The son of a Lancashire man suggests the possibility of "Something like 'The Hampdenshire Wonder' that Beresford wrote about, or Stapledon's 'Odd John.'" One of the two Americans present opines "I can see us defending ourselves mighty toughly against any mutations" (91). Someone identified as "a tall man in whose speech was a faint suggestion of the north Midlands" (90) (a partial surrogate for the not-so-tall, cigarette-smoker Harris, who spent his early years in Birmingham?) "puffed at his cigarette" and elects to tell the group about someone he knew who had "A sixth sense" (92): "But I warn you that all the names and places will be faked. If there is any chance of following the business up, I want to do it myself" (93).

With this new precaution, the "tall man" begins in Chapter Two to narrate "The Strange Case of Ted Filler" (actually someone of a different name) of "Irkwell in Derbyshire" (actually of somewhere else), where the "tall man" practices "medicine" (93), pretty much as in "Frustrate Glimpse". However, unlike the doctor of "Frustrate Glimpse" but like the frame narrator of "Child of Power," this doctor is unnamed. The themes of secrecy and paranoia are more to the fore in this revision. The next three chapters—"The Boy Who Saw Sound" (which takes up the story three years later), "Strange New World," and "Voices of the Void" (from aliens on other planets)—all correspond, with some expansions, to "Frustrate Glimpse."

The last chapter, "The Gift of Ages" is as significant a revision of the conclusion of "Frustrate Glimpse" as the first is of the opening, and not just because it involves the frame. Once more, the question of "Ted's" education arises but this characterization of the ideal kind of education is new: the prerequisite to eventually understanding the alien signals would be "a mind trained to patience and the scientific approach, perceptive and yet plodding, a mind with tenacity of purpose" (112). This sounds rather like Harris's own methodical mind, and rather like that of the unnamed doctor who seems a bit like Harris. It follows that both Harris and the doctor are describing an ideal son. The doctor does not consult a specialist at Leeds University in "Child of Power." Instead "Ted's" schoolteacher "Pauley" (his name like that of everyone else, one must assume, is an alias) plays a larger role; he also thinks that "Ted" should go to college although,

unlike the doctor, "Pauley" recommends that "Ted" finance his education by performing in the Music Halls. The tale concludes with "Ted" losing his sixth sense in an electrical storm like Ted. But the back-in-the-pub closing frame of course differs. The doctor appears to hope that "Ted" will have a fatal accident: "Some day perhaps he'll do something silly and I shall be able to have a look at his brain—if his pigheaded relatives allow it." The Lancashire man then has the lost word. He figures that "Ted" is better off normal: "e'll be happier that way, you know. Freaks ain't happy" (116).

But a Kind of Ghost (1951?/Spring 1957): A Sexual Role Model. "But a Kind of Ghost" exists in manuscript in the Archive as three carbon copies—the first two each thirty-one pages and a final version of thirty-three pages, plus carbons of three pages (numbered 1, 23, and 33) added to the final version. One of the two thirty-one page carbon copies includes the handwritten title page statements "unpublished 28-8-51" and "not sold in England". The stamp "c/o Frederick Pohl, Dirk Wylie Agency, 521 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, NY" is crossed out on both of these carbon copies. The title of the thirty-one-page carbon copies includes three ellipsis points before and after; the title of the thirty-three-page carbon copy only has three ellipsis points before and is, like "Child of Power" and no other Harris title, "by Wyndham Parkes." The reader of the story will learn at its conclusion that the title derives from a poem in John Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*.

The story was published (without any title ellipsis points) in the first issue (Spring 1957) of what was intended to be a bi-monthly magazine, *Tales of the Frightened*. This all came about as follows (see Tymn 649–50). In 1957 the American thriller writer Michael Avallone wrote and presumably commissioned some stories to be read by Boris Karloff for a new radio series, "The Frightened." The magazine tie-in, *Tales of the Frightened*, supposedly edited by Karloff was actually ghost-edited by Avallone. Only two issues of the magazine appeared. (It should be noted that the stories compiled in Avallone's 1963 book *Tales of the Frightened* [New York: Belmont] are all his.)

Unlike the two earlier stories and "Chocky"/*Chocky*, the protagonist, Sam Timeways is not a child; he is a young man but in at least one important respect an immature one. He lives with his parents in the old "town of Yoxburgh" on the east coast of England, an area of coastline which is losing its battle with the sea.¹⁵ As the cliffs crumble, things turn up on the shore. Arising early one morning, Sam sees a box projecting from the cliff face; it had been buried twelve feet from the surface. Sam dislodges the box, brings it home to his bedroom, and takes his girlfriend Mary to the fair at Becwich. Later, back home, he forces the box open to discover that it contains the naked body of a young woman. Alarmed, Sam decides to transport the box and its occupant back to the shore but, in embarking on this project, he is interrupted by his repressive father, Albert, who wants to know what is in the box. On looking into the opened box, Albert and his unnamed wife see nothing there: "Put it in the shed, lad . . ." (107). (On page

15 of the thirty-three-page carbon—"shed" substitutes for the word "outhouse" found on page 22 of the thirty-one-page carbon.) Only Sam can see the naked corpse, and he now notices that his hands pass through it.

That night Sam cannot sleep and he is visited by the ghost of the young woman in the box. With plaits down to her knees, "she" is still naked: "My name is Hiltrude" (108). "She" explains that her Viking compatriots put her in the box and buried her alive because she was a jinx, she was believed to have caused misfortunes by her "evil star" (109). At this point Albert (another jinx?) comes in because he hears Sam talking; he cannot see the ghost of Hiltrude just as, in similar overhearing situations, the father in "Fairy Story" cannot see Tisiphone and the "father" in "Chocky/*Chocky*" cannot see the alien Chocky. These three stories all share this episode where a father figure overhears what appears to be one side of a conversation. As with a telephone conversation, one speaker is visibly present but the other cannot be seen.

The lusty Hiltrude tells Sam that he and his fellows (presumably Albert included, or perhaps especially Albert) are not real men, and that Mary is dying for Sam to make love to her. Describing herself as "no more than a dream in the wind" (111), "she" takes over Sam's body and, in a literal sense, has "her" way with him. "He" becomes the ghost—"one was more tenuous than the wind" (112)—and Hiltrude as Sam makes love to Mary. Following an episode in which the wayward "Sam" is temporarily in prison for stealing the gold band from the box and trying to sell it, the no-longer-possessed real Sam goes to the previously more mature Mary's cottage and tells her he loves her. He is now a real man. The story ends with Mary quoting a couple of unidentified lines (from Donne's "The Blossom") she "found in an old book": "A naked thinking heart, that makes no show, / Is to a woman, but a kind of ghost" (115). Sam was a ghost of a man; Hiltrude (a masculinization of Gertrude, Harris's mother) was his true father, the ghost of the *man* he must strive to be.

In effect, Hiltrude has substituted for the may-as-well-be-absent inadequate father Albert and provided Sam with a role model for appropriate emotional and sexual behaviour. There is a good deal of evidence in the letters preserved in the Archive that Harris wrote to Grace during the Second World War (when she and her school were evacuated to South Wales and subsequently when he was a cipher operator in the Royal Signals) that he was as tongue tied as Sam; he believed he could not adequately express (in words at least) his love for her. The implication has to be that had Harris's father not disappeared from his life when he was eight years old, he would have been a more adequate lover.

"Chocky"/*Chocky* (1963/1969): A Father Looks Down. More manuscript material survives for "Chocky" and *Chocky* than for any other Harris narrative. There is the corrected and revised 124-page holograph manuscript (plus the last two pages [78–79] of a typescript version and a typescript insertion for holograph page 49) for the novella which appeared in the March and April 1963 issues of *Good Housekeeping* (and, in America, in the March 1963 issue of

Amazing Stories). The *Good Housekeeping* placement was important because Harris hoped the story would appeal to women readers. (This novella version was reprinted as an eight-part serial in the British magazine *Princess* beginning with the issue dated August 14, 1965.) Two holograph manuscripts exist for the longer 1969 novel version. The complete one is of 352 corrected pages. The other, of 145 less heavily corrected pages, only comprises the first six of the novel's twelve chapters. The lightly corrected typescript of the novel changes the name of a daughter but does not include the representation of a medal with which the published novel (but not the novella) ends. The corresponding carbon typescript lacks the name change but includes the medal representation. There are also three copies of the Scripts Limited agency's printed typescript, each lightly corrected, and one with a sheet of twenty-two minor corrections (e.g., the deletion of "Catherine of Russia" between "Elizabeth the First" and "Florence Nightingale" as examples of achieving childless women¹⁶) in Harris's hand, loosely inserted. In the account of "*Chocky*" (a combination of the novella and the novel) which follows, I treat manuscript variants and additions or changes in the novel in relation to the novella version.¹⁷

"Chocky" is about an adopted boy named Matthew Gore, aged almost twelve, who is in telepathic communication with an alien named Chocky, who is light years away. But its estranged autobiographical content is not difficult to decipher; it is about a wished-for line of communication between the young (and perhaps not so young) John Harris and an idealization of his father George. Matthew's last name, "Gore," is an anagram of the different letters of "George" ("e" and "g" are repeated). Harris had been gored. The absence of his father was a source of pain, a personal injury, a bloody open wound. When the novella opens (likewise the novel), it is late April or early March (compare the *Good Housekeeping* and *Amazing Stories* publication dates) and Matthew has not yet had his twelfth birthday. (The opening of *The Midwich Cuckoos*, it might be observed, also refers to the birthday of a protagonist.) We are not told the date of Matthew's birthday, but, like Harris's (on July 10), it does not occur in the first four months of the year. It seems likely, however, by the end of the novella, and by the twelfth and final chapter of the novel, which appears to take place during the autumn of the same year, that Matthew has turned twelve.

I shall marshal further and perhaps stronger evidence that Matthew is a version of Harris as a child but that identification, essential to a biographical understanding of the texts, should not obliterate aspects of Matthew's characterization based on other children. Sister Bede recognizes, in notes she has prepared entitled "Chronology of Jack's Major Works," something of herself, her sister Jean, and a local adopted child named David Sykes in Matthew. Harris was friends with two families in Steep: the Barkers and the financially much-better-off Sykes family, who lived in the famous Red House up the hill designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens (and once the home of the poet Edward Thomas). Sister Bede believes that the Sykes family was the main inspiration for the character Matthew. Early

in their marriage, Bill Sykes (a friend from Harris's Bedales schooldays) and Leslie, not succeeding in having children of their own, adopted David. In the same situation, David Gore, the narrator, and his wife, Mary, adopted Matthew. About four years after the Sykes adopted David, they had their own daughter, Matthilda. Just after adopting Matthew (compare the name Matthilda), the Gores had their own daughter, Betty (changed to Polly in the ribbon typescript of the novel and in the published novel). Sister Bede concludes that "The father-son easy relationship is partly Bill, partly Jack, with David (always reasonable and calm)." But "the artistic aspects of Matthew's activities may have been adapted more from my sister Jean and myself—we were often drawing, painting, designing things." Indeed, "The original idea behind the book *may* have originated with *me*: because I did sometimes talk to myself when I was trying to draw or paint, or write."

Sister Bede is recalling the opening of "*Chocky*." In his garden shed, Matthew's father, David Gore, the narrator (identified as an accountant in the novel) overhears Matthew talking to someone who is apparently not there about a planet/sun relationship involving a thirty-two hour day, an eight day week, and a thirty-two day month:

At about this point the peculiarity of this one-sided conversation aroused my curiosity enough to make me put my head cautiously out of the window. It was warm outside. Matthew was sitting on an old seed tray, leaning back against the shed wall a little to my left, so that I looked down on the top of his fair head. He seemed to be gazing straight ahead of him across the garden. There was no sign of anyone else. ("*Chocky*" 57–58; cf. *Chocky* 8)¹⁸

The tableau here described (with a deleted "bottom-up" before "seed-tray" in the holograph manuscript of the novella and the more refined "upturned" substituted in the novel) conveys the autobiographical essence of the story. On this "warm" ("*Chocky*" 58), "sunny" (*Chocky* 8) day, David Gore, looking down on his adopted son, is in the same metaphorical position as Chocky. But Chocky is not just an equivalent father figure; he is the true father; Matthew is his seed. In the novel Harris slightly amends this tableau and underlines its emblematic significance by having David look directly down on Matthew's round head: "Matthew was seated on an upturned seed-tray, leaning back against the brick wall of the shed just under the window, so that I was looking down on the top of his fair-haired head" (8). This symbolic hierarchical positioning of the father and Chocky in relation to Matthew is confirmed a little later when Matthew asks his mother, Mary, to make Chocky "go away"; to do so "she addressed herself to a point slightly above Matthew's head" ("*Chocky*" 152; *Chocky* 26).

At first David and Mary believe that Matthew simply has an imaginary friend much like "Piff," the imaginary friend of his sister Betty/Polly. Sister Bede recalls that her sister Jean had a similar "obsessive imaginary playmate when she was about 5–6 years old." It was named "'Tinka'—based on the character in

a book she had at Dunhurst School [the Bedales primary school]" about the "Good Fairy Tinkabell." ("Tinka" would seem to be at least equally a source for "Tissy" in "Fairy Story.") In the novel, the account of Piff is preceded by an eight-page addition (10–18) explaining how David and Mary "met sixteen years before" (10) and other background information.

Matthew's understanding that Chocky is neither male nor female, or perhaps both, prompts one of the odd questions that Mary recalls his asking her: "Why are there two sexes?" ("Chocky" 150; *Chocky* 21). The implication, of course, is that two sexes provide a basis for dissension and marital upset. Part of what makes Chocky an ideal father are his/her feminine sensitivities. Matthew uses feminine pronouns in relation to Chocky, and "We decided that Chocky's balance did on the whole lean more to the F than the M, and agreed that in future . . . it would be convenient to class Chocky as feminine" (*Chocky* 30–31). Chocky is likened to "Wordsworth's cuckoo" ("Chocky" 152; *Chocky* 27) but Matthew is also a kind of cuckoo, since David and Mary are not his real parents. Mary wishes "we knew something ['a little'] more about his parents. . . . With Betty ['In Polly'] I can see bits of you and bits of me" ("Chocky" 150; *Chocky* 22). There is a significant addition in the novel at this point: "I could see what she meant—though I have my reservations about the validity of this ability to see parent in child" (22). This might well imply that Harris did not see much of himself in his own parents, and that he saw himself as an alien cuckoo child.

Evidence of the peculiar ideas that Matthew has picked up from Chocky continue to accumulate. On a Sunday walk with his father in a field of cows, Matthew wonders why cows stop learning. This plot detail sparked the following recollection for Sister Bede: "I can remember a similar conversation about the odd limitations of the abilities of cows to learn, when on a country walk with Jack and my Daddy." But Matthew's parents are not the only people concerned about Matthew's "advanced" thinking. His maths teacher, Mr. Trimble, comes round one evening because he wants to know from whom Matthew learnt about binary code mathematics. Shortly thereafter, Matthew conveys to his father Chocky's failure to be impressed by the family's brand-new station-wagon. To Chocky, it's a hopelessly primitive vehicle. The same applies to the boat that Matthew explores during a weekend visit to the coast.

It is agreed that Matthew should see some kind of expert, a psychiatrist perhaps. David contacts someone he knew at Cambridge—Roy Landis who "specialized in ['went in for'] mental disorders" and is now "at the Cloudeley" ("Chocky" 161; *Chocky* 46). (Before Landis's visit, the novel adds a few pages [51–55] describing a visit from Mary's sister Janet, her husband, and their two youngest children.) When Landis does arrive, he is left alone with Matthew. Afterwards, he prefaces his diagnosis of "possession" with his mistaken early assumption: "to begin with, I suspected that he had been reading too much fantastic stuff, and was failing to distinguish it from reality" ("Chocky" 164; compare with *Chocky* 57). This, of course, was what the father in "Fairy Story"

was attempting to forestall. When Landis leaves and Part One of the *Good House-keeping* "Chocky" ends (the end of chapter 5 in *Chocky*) Mary, in particular, is glad to see him go. She is very disturbed by his diagnosis.

In the first paragraph of Part Two (derived from the typescript page insert for page 49 of the holograph manuscript and revised somewhat in the novel) David sympathizes with his wife about Landis's overly analytical diagnosis. Mary has taken Matthew to see the family physician, Dr Aycott; in the novel she visits Aycott without Matthew. But, as David had suspected earlier, Matthew's case was way beyond Dr Aycott's experience. By this point in the narrative, Matthew has produced a number of rather strange drawings which are explained as the result of Chocky taking over his hand: "Why they look sort of funny is because that's how Chocky sees things" ("Chocky" 141; *Chocky* 73).

During a holiday in Bontcoch (corrected to "Bontgoch" in the novel) in North Wales (where, it is added in the novel, the narrator "had enjoyed several holidays in my own childhood" [78]¹⁹) with old friends of the family, Joe and Phyl Deacon ("Alan and Phyl Froome" in the novel) and their two children, Chocky takes over rather more than Matthew's drawing hand. Matthew and his sister fall into a fast-moving river. They both survive and Matthew emerges as something of a hero because he swims towards his sister and rescues her. But Matthew cannot swim; Chocky was doing the swimming for him. (This incident may owe something to the time when Harris as a child [and a strong swimmer] rescued his brother from drowning. Vivian writes in the last lines of his incomplete memoir "Jack and Me" that "There was a pond in the garden [of our house Brynfield in Birmingham] into which I fell and was held up by the hair until Nurse rushed out ^up^ and pulled me out which was the first time Jack saved my life."²⁰)

An observer "says that if he ever saw anything that deserved a medal, that did; and he's going to make sure that Matthew gets one" ("Chocky" 147; *Chocky* 80). (The medal idea may go back to the "Frustrate Glimpse" manuscript; the doctor narrator points out regarding the desirability of Ted going to university that his mother "did not see a scholarship as charity, but as a medal or a diploma; the first of many" [insert page 37].) After Matthew's obstinate assertion "it was Chocky that ['who'] did it" ("Chocky" 150; *Chocky* 83), there is a lengthy addition in the novel (83-123) dealing with various problems arising from the publicity that Matthew receives for his heroic action: Landis's proposal that Matthew should see the open-minded psychoanalyst Sir William Thorbe, the idea that Chocky is some kind of "guardian angel" (99, 100), Chocky's belief that we have spoilt, polluted, "a very beautiful planet" (108), a description of "Matthew's" drawing of Chocky's Mars-like home planet, and Matthew's news that Chocky is "leaving—clearing out" (117), as Harris's father did. Mary cannot understand why her son is so upset, leaving her husband "astonished" at "how the kindest and most sympathetic of women can pettify and downgrade the searing anguishes of childhood" (118). Can a reader doubt

that Harris is here directly recalling "the searing anguishes of" his own childhood—in particular, the loss of his father?

Toward the end of this long insert in the novel, David looks at "Matthew's" picture of Chocky's home world and is struck by "The harsh monotony of the colouring, and the feeling of arid heat" (121). There then follows an objective correlative which represents the globe of the sun (an analogue for Chocky's hot world) partially above the horizon of our globe (an analogue of David's head above Matthew's in the opening tableau), and then sinking below that horizon:

There was a pause. We looked out of the window at the red arc of sun fretted by the treetops as it set. I asked him:

Has she gone, Matthew?

Yes, Daddy.

We were silent while the last rim of the sun sank down and disappeared. Matthew sniffed. His eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Daddy. . . it's like losing part of me." (121)

The insert ends with an account of Matthew's seeing Sir William Thorbe. Thorbe, from whom David "had expected a lot" (122), and who may well be understood as another avatar of Harris's father, has apparently simply dismissed Chocky as a fantasy that Matthew will soon grow out of. Sir William, by this account, seems rather like the father in "Fairy Story." But, as we shall soon learn, Thorbe's dismissal is deliberately misleading.

None of this is in the novella, which simply continues with a description of the medal that Matthew receives from "the Society" (150), which is identified at the same point in the novel as the "Royal Swimming Society" (123). In the novella, it is "For a Brave Deed" (150); in the novel "FOR A VALOROUS DEED" (124). On the other side of the medal is represented "a boy and girl standing hand-in-hand regarding a sun which one presumed, from its wealth of radiation, to be rising" ("Chocky" 150; compare with *Chocky* 124). In the novel, Harris adds a detail describing the medal as a "golden disc gleaming in its bed of blue velvet" (124). Harris's purpose here, of course, is to link the round medal itself with the sun and with the preceding insert vignette of the setting sun. The analogue set up between the golden disc, the sun, Chocky's hot planet, and the Earth/sun, father/son equations established in the story's opening tableau will inform the novel's pictorial conclusion. But the important narrative point at this moment in both novella and novel is that Matthew does not believe that he deserves the medal.

Chapter 10 in the novel and the first five short paragraphs of chapter 11 (126–36) constitute a fourth addition of some length. Matthew is kidnapped by "a man with a big car" (128)—possibly a Mercedes—and ten days later found lost at "a busy crossing in Birmingham" (129), where he is picked up by a policeman and eventually returned to his parents. During his captivity, efforts had been made by using truth drugs to find out as much as possible about Chocky

and his power and what can be learned from the alien. But the symbolic logic of the story and the Birmingham location—the place where the young Harris grew up with family intact for the first eight years of his life—his home town—suggests that the mysterious man in the expensive car who kidnaps Matthew is a fourth avatar of Harris's father (counting David, Sir William Thorbe, and Chocky as the other three).

The novella and the novel conclude with Chocky's return and his talking to David, his father, through Matthew; it is time for explanations. Although the novel version of this considerably expands on and revises the novella—and as throughout the skillfully and logically developed plot (a characteristic of Harris's work)—one important autobiographical detail occurs in both versions. Referring to Matthew, Chocky says, "The other part of his parent will be glad to know I am going: it does not like me and is afraid of me because it thinks I am bad for Matthew" (154). In the novel this is revised as follows: "the other part of his parent, I mean Mummy, I mean your wife, will be gladder because it is afraid of me and thinks I am bad for Matthew, which is a pity because I did not mean me, I mean you, I mean Matthew, any harm. Do you understand?" (139) Ironically, the confusion of identities in the revision clarifies the parallels between David Gore, Chocky, and George Beynon Harris; between Mary Gore and Gertrude Parkes Harris; and between Matthew Gore and John Harris. What Harris is alluding to here is the antipathy his mother bore towards his father.

Chocky tells David in the novella that he is "learning to be a scout" (157). In the novel, Chocky is more accomplished; he is a combination explorer, scout, missionary, and teacher (139). "She" and her kind are looking for other planets to colonise but Earth is not suitable; it's "much too hot, too much dry land, not enough wet land." (154). Earth is not suitable in the novel for the opposite reasons: "it is much too cold for us, and there is a great deal too much water" (141). This revision accords with the novel's description of Chocky's hot, home planet, and with the symbolic equation I have already noted between that planet and our sun. But in using Matthew as a remote sensor, Chocky has not been able to maintain the detachment "her" scout role requires: "The proper scout temperament . . . would not have permitted itself to develop an affection for Matthew which could lead to actual interference with the natural course of events" ("Chocky" 154).

In the novel, Chocky and her kind are not just colonists; they have the altruistic ambition to foster and treasure whatever rare manifestations of life—"a holy thing" (142)—they come across. Why did "she" pick on Matthew? "Young minds, she explained, have absorbed so much that is unlikely and inexplicable from myths, legends, fairy-stories, and religion, that they are disposed to accept the improbable with little question, providing it is not alarming" (145). That is to say, Matthew is kin to Priscilla of "Fairy Story." In all "she" outlines four requirements that led to the selection of Matthew. Chocky goes on to explain that Sir William Thorbe did indeed believe that Matthew was in contact with a

superior extraterrestrial intelligence. Convinced he had "struck gold" (147), Sir William passed "his news to someone else" (148), and that led to the kidnapping. Perhaps the knowledge that Matthew has access to can be tapped and exploited. Because Matthew will be watched, it would be wise of him not to take up science; that might give the impression that he was still in touch with Chocky. Perhaps he should develop his artistic skills: "As an artist he would be safe" (150). Safe, too, perhaps as a writer of SF like Harris.

The last scene with Matthew and his father is also considerably revised in the novel. Added in the last chapter is David and Matthew's walk along "the river bank" (152) near their home (intended to remind the reader of the river in Wales into which Matthew and his sister fell) and David's handing his son a corrected version of the medal he had received for rescuing his sister: "The medal glittered in the sunlight, reverse side uppermost" (154). The drawing of that side of the gold, sunlike coin with which the novel concludes (an outer circle containing an inner circle) bears the legend "AWARDED TO [upper outer circle] CHOCKY [inner circle] FOR A VALOROUS DEED [lower outer circle]." The true saviour has now been recognized. Matthew, on a sunny day, looking down at the gold medal is a reverse mirror of the opening sunny day tableau—his father "looking down on the top of his fair-haired head" (*Chocky* 8; compare with "Chocky" 58). Simultaneously, Chocky's world/sun, previously seen disappearing below Earth's horizon, is once more visible against a blue sky background (the "bed of blue velvet" [*Chocky* 124; "Chocky" 150] on which the medal lies). In acknowledging the true saviour, Harris is also acknowledging the idealized father, Matthew's and his own. Not just the previous misleading medal is corrected by the new one. The absence of the name George Beynon Harris on that memorial plaque at Cwrt, North Wales might also be viewed as to some extent corrected, or at least compensated for, by the pictured medal.²¹

Notes

1. For one demonstration see David Ketterer, "'A Part of the . . . Family[?]'": John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* as Estranged Autobiography."
2. In fact, the proof copies of *The Midwich Cuckoos* and *Chocky* are not at Bedales, as I discovered in May 1998 when I visited the library there to take a look at them. At what must have been the last moment, they accidentally ended up as part of the John Wyndham Archive, which was sold by the antiquarian booksellers Bertram Rota, Limited, to the Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool in 1997. They were not included in Bertram Rota's finding list for the Archive. Consequently, these two proof copies are now considered on loan to the Sydney Jones Library.
3. I am quoting from a chart prepared by Sister Bede, entitled "Possible Chronology of J. Wyndham's Books." For information about the Barkers and Harris's relationship with them, see the Ketterer essay in note 1 above. I am grateful to Sister Bede for all the information she has supplied.
4. "Fairy Story," I. Subsequent references are to this holograph manuscript.
5. The woman as Fury trope is most apparent in Harris's unpublished SF thriller completed in 1948; see Ketterer "PLAN FOR CHAOS/FURY OF CREATION, 13, 17, 24n. 13.

6. For these biographical details, see the all-that-was-written three-and-a-half pages of the first chapter of a memoir entitled "JACK AND ME: GROWING UP WITH JOHN WYNDHAM," which Vivian Beynon Harris drafted. This very hard to read holograph fragment (and an equally hard to read handwritten, thirteen-page memoir that covers "Wyndham's" entire life) may be located among the material that Harris's solicitor, Brian Bowcock, has deposited at the Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool. For my edition of both, see Vivian Beynon Harris, *My Brother, John Wyndham* (transcriptions: 18–35, 44–48).
7. Letter to Ketterer from Miss Mollie M. Raymer (a friend of Harris's and contemporary resident at the Penn Club—named for the Quaker William Penn—in London, where Harris lived from 1925 to 1963 with a break during the war), January 4, 1997.
8. I am grateful to Brian Bowcock for providing me with a copy of Vivian's Will, and for reproducing the National Trust wording (letter to Ketterer, July 4, 1997).
9. See the section entitled "The Absent Father" in the Ketterer article mentioned in note 1 above.
10. Vivian Beynon Harris 48–49.
11. "Frustrate Glimpse," 1. Subsequent references are to this manuscript.
12. Variants of the name "Pauley" recur in Harris's fiction. See "Pawley's Peepholes" (1951) and the Pawle brothers in *The Midwich Cuckoos*.
13. In the last story Harris published, "A Life Postponed" (1968), he contrives a solution to this dilemma. Willie Trevinnick (compare with Tribert) and Cyra Chapworth make use of suspended animation in order to have their children in a much improved, if not ideal, future world.
14. See "Child of Power" as reprinted in John Wyndham, *Wanderers of Time*, 90. Subsequent references are to this edition.
15. See "But a Kind of Ghost," 101. Subsequent references are to this text.
16. See *Chocky*, 15. Subsequent references are to this edition.
17. Vivian Beynon Harris thought well of *Chocky*: "I think *Chocky* will make a wonderful film and the "Wednesday Play" version in sound he [his brother] greatly enjoyed" (29). *Chocky* has in fact been repeatedly adapted. A sixty-minute version of the adaptation for the BBC Radio's "Midweek Theatre" series was broadcast on Radio 2 on November 27, 1968, and repeated on Radio 4 on November 28, 1968. An expanded 105 minute version was broadcast by the BBC from May 19 to 27, 1975. In 1983 it became an ITV (Independent Television) serial, followed by sequels in 1986 entitled *Chocky's Children* and *Chocky's Challenge*. The script of *Chocky's Challenge* by Anthony Reid was novelized by Mark Daniel and published (with the same title) by Magnet in 1986 (Stephensen-Payne 25, 33). *Chocky* was most recently adapted (and updated) for radio in 1998.
18. Page references to "Chocky" are to the *Good Housekeeping* version.
19. Presumably Harris had himself in his childhood enjoyed several holidays with his Welsh father at Bontgoch. Cwrt, where Vivian Beynon Harris's memorial plaque is located (see page 87), is about twelve miles north of Bontgoch.
20. Vivian Beynon Harris 49. The medal that Matthew receives for his supposed bravery may have been, to some degree, suggested by the silver medal that Vivian Harris was awarded in 1923 by the Life Saving Society at Bedales (*Bedales Chronicle* 65).
21. For perhaps the best evidence as to how Harris and his brother regarded their mysterious, absent father, see my account of an unpublished play by Vivian in the introduction to *My Brother, John Wyndham* (Vivian Beynon Harris 11–14).

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