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Arthur Ransome, a Children's Author? Swallows, Amazons and the Lake District

Arthur Ransome, (nejen) autor dětských knih o Vlaštovkách a Amazonkách

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Anotace

Předmětem zkoumání bakalářské práce je život a dílo britského autora dětských knih příběhů o Vlaštokách a Amazonkách Arthura Ransoma. Práce v úvodu představí životopis kontroverzního autora, který proslul jako autor série dětských příběhů a zároveň naplňoval představu bohémského životního stylu a nevšedních zájmů v kulturní i politické oblasti. Cílem práce je kriticky zhodnotit rozporuplné osudy a peripetie autorova života na základě biografických a autobiografických pramenů (Brogan, Chambers, Hyland, Ransome) a pokusit se vystihnout podstatu dětských dobrodružných příběhů meziválečného období v Anglii s e zaměřením na charakteristiku regionu tzv. Jezerní oblasti (Lake District) a jeho kulturního dědictví. V závěru práce porovná kritickou odezvu a kulturní význam Ransomových příběhů ve 20. století a v současnosti.

Abstract

The subject of the bachelor's thesis will be the life and literary work of the English author Arthur Ransome. The work will first focus on a detailed description of the author's life and what led him to write a children's book series, even though he lived a bohemian life and had extraordinary interests in culture and politics. The aim of the thesis is to critically evaluate the contradictory destinies and vicissitudes of the author's life based on biographical and autobiographical sources (Brogan, Chambers, Hyland, Ransome) and try to capture the essence of children's adventure stories in England with a focus on the characteristics of the Lake District) and its cultural heritage. At the end of the work, it compares the critical response and cultural significance of Ransom's stories in the 20th century and the present.

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Introduction

Arthur Ransome was a prominent British author who was inspired by his own experiences and hobbies and was able to translate his passion for sailing into children's novels. It was the thirteen-part novel series about children's adventures in the Lake District that made him most famous. The thesis will begin with the first chapter, focusing on the author's biography. The author's biography will be divided into six subchapters, which mark certain periods of the author's life. The first half of the chapter will deal mainly with his childhood years and time spent with his family. It also describes the various transfers between schools, which is indicative of Ransom's profligacy. The decisive moment that decided which direction the author would take, was when he was perusing books in the Yorkshire college library. From then on, the author's ambition was not to become a chemist but a writer. So he left school for good and embarked on the harrowing journey of becoming a writer. He managed to write several books, become a London publisher, was adopted by Collingwood's and married Ivy Walker with whom he had a daughter Tabitha. The second half of the chapter will focus on his adventures abroad, specifically in Russia, and his beginnings in writing *Swallows and Amazons*. In Russia, he met a few notables such as Harold Williams, Ariadna Tyrkova or Leon Trotsky. He enjoyed his time in Russia, learned Russian and even wrote a collection of Russian folk tales, called *Old Peter's Russian Tales*. However, the author became a controversial figure between 1917 and 1924, when he worked as a Russian correspondent for the *Daily News*. He was said to have worked for British Intelligence as an agent. He fell in love with Trotsky's secretary, Evgenia Shelepina, whom he then married in 1924. They settled in the Lake District and a few years later, in 1929, he began working on *Swallow and Amazons*. In the section on *Swallows and Amazons*, I will focus on the writer's search for inspiration to write the first book and his initial response, which was not very positive as the novel did not quite fit the author's typical genre and target readership. In the last part of the first chapter, I will focus on Ransom's last years, which he spent peacefully with his wife Evgenia and in which he worked on his autobiography. The second chapter will be divided into several parts and will deal with the literary analysis of the first book in the series and will also provide additional information on the characters and reviews. As for the analysis of the book, I will focus on a summary of the main plot and a description of the most important characters, as well as the most important themes, motifs, and symbols. In addition, I will look at the overall structure of

the novel and the language used. I would also describe the setting in which the story takes place and the historical context. The subject of the shorter third chapter will be the literature produced in connection with the Lake District. The main emphasis here will be on describing authors who have been influenced in some way by the Lake District environment, such as Beatrix Potter, Alfred Wainwright, William Wordsworth, John Ruskin, and John Cunliffe. The fourth chapter will summarize what Arthur Ransome achieved as an author and what impact does his literature have.

1 Arthur Mitchell Ransome

1.1 Early Life

Arthur Mitchell Ransome was born in Leeds on January 18, 1884. His father, Cyril, was from Manchester and studied history at Oxford before becoming a Professor of History at the Yorkshire College (which later became Leeds University). Arthur's mother, Edith, was the daughter of artist Edward Baker Boulton, who spent much of his time in Australia as a sheep farmer. Arthur had an older brother, Geoffrey, and two sisters, Cicely and Joyce. When his father died in 1897 it had a lasting effect on Ransome because he was always trying to overcome his belief that his father lacked confidence in his abilities.¹

The Ransome family spent several vacations in Coniston Water, in the English Lake District, where Arthur formed an early interest in the place and its residents. Above all, he learned to adore the lake, and it became a private rite for him to dash down to the water and dip his hand in like a greeting when he arrived.

1.2 School days

Ransome started his education at Yorkshire College, but he only stayed for a few months since his father sent him to boarding school in Windermere. According to the author's memoirs, his father wanted him to attend a school with a lake-country setting, and the fact that he and the headmaster got along certainly helped.² He was unhappy at Windermere's Old College. Because there were few books at school, Arthur made up for it by reading a lot during the holidays. He went on to Rugby School, where he was considerably happier and came under the wing of sympathetic teachers, despite not being a particularly bright student. Arthur's father died of a bone infection just before he came to Rugby since amputation of a limb had failed to prevent it. Arthur thought he had been a disappointment to his father and had missed out on the chance to get closer to him as an adult when Cyril Ransome died at the age of 46, but he did inherit his father's passion for fishing.³

¹ HYLAND, P. A Brief Biography of Arthur Ransome, 2013.

<https://www.allthingsransome.net/literary/arbiography.html>

² RANSOME, A. The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome. London : J. Cape, 1976.

³ HYLAND, P. A Brief Biography of Arthur Ransome, 2013.

<https://www.allthingsransome.net/literary/arbiography.html>

1.3 Adult Years

Arthur Ransome left Rugby in 1901 and decided to return to Leeds at Yorkshire College to study science. He enjoyed working in a chemical laboratory, but his enthusiasm for science faded over time. His desire to write books, on the other hand, rose significantly. The decisive moment found him in the College library. He had come from the laboratory to consult a book on mensuration or magnetism. On the shelves, he discovered volumes regarding William Morris's life. He was fascinated by the lives of young Morris and his friends, lives in which nothing seemed to matter but the creation of beautiful things and the creation of a world to match them. His fate was sealed from that day forward, but he had no idea where to begin because he was nothing like Morris.⁴

His ambition was not to become a chemist, but a writer, so after less than a year he left Yorkshire College and went to London to become a writer. To survive, he took low-paid jobs as an office assistant and editor of failing magazines, while writing and becoming a member of the London literary scene. He managed to get a job as a London publisher and relocate to the south to pursue his dream of becoming a writer. His career in publishing lasted only 18 months, following which he began writing essays for literary publications to supplement his income.⁵ He was reading as many novels as he could at that moment. Ransome returned to Coniston in 1903, where he encountered artist and writer W. G. Collingwood, whom he recognized as the author of *Thorstein of the Mere*, which he had read as a boy. Collingwood would have a significant influence on Ransome, and the Collingwood family adopted him. Ransome's first book, *The Souls of the Streets*, was published in 1904, followed by another collection, *The Stone Lady*, in 1905, neither of which was favorably received. Except for *Bohemia in London*, released in 1907 and often regarded as Ransome's first 'real novel,' other volumes followed and were similarly unsuccessful.⁶ While residing in an Owen Mansions apartment in 1908, he was approached by friends who brought young Miss Ivy Walker, with whom Ransome fell in love. In 1909, they married. The couple settled in Hampshire, near Petersfield, where Ransome finished his new work, *History of Storytelling*, which garnered a lot of positive feedback. Tabitha,

⁴ RANSOME, A. *The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome*. London : J. Cape, 1976.

⁵ Arthur Ransome's Biography [online].

<https://arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Arthur-Ransome-Biography.pdf>

⁶ HYLAND, P. *A Brief Biography of Arthur Ransome*, 2013.

<https://www.allthingsransome.net/literary/arbiography.html>

their only child, was born in May 1910 to Ivy and her husband. After the publication of the first few volumes, Arthur Ransome produced commissioned works on Edgar Allan Poe (1910) and Oscar Wilde (1920). The book on Wilde led to a libel suit by Lord Alfred Douglas against Ransome and his publishers, but the case was dismissed by the High Court in April 1913.⁷

1.4 Abroad

In 1913, Arthur Ransome travelled to Russia where he was unfamiliar with anyone, similar to when he was an office boy in London at the age of eighteen. While in St. Petersburg, he met several interesting and helpful individuals from the expatriate community. One of the people Ransome met in St. Petersburg was Harold Williams, the son of a British missionary and a skilled linguist whom Ransome admired. Ransome benefited from Williams's encyclopaedic knowledge of Russian history, his journalistic contacts, and a friendship with his wife, Ariadna Tyrkova, who was the first woman to be elected to the Russian parliament and a passionate advocate of constitutional reform.⁸

Arthur Ransome spent three months in St. Petersburg learning Russian and collecting Russian folktales. Upon his return to England, he published a rhyming version of Aladdin and the story "Blue Treacle." During his visits to Russia in 1914 and 1915, he compiled a collection of Russian folktales called "Old Peter's Russian Tales." In November 1915, Ransome returned to Russia as a correspondent for the Daily News, based in Moscow, where he spent four years reporting on the Revolution and its aftermath. It is believed that he also passed information to British intelligence during this time, although his independent mindset made him unsuitable as an agent.⁹ Between 1917 and 1924, as a Russian correspondent for the Daily News and Manchester Guardian, he was an uncritical apologist for the Bolshevik regime, with unique access to the revolutionary leaders. Ransome was having an affair with Evgenia Shelepina, Leon Trotsky's private secretary, while the Red Army was fighting an Allied invasion of Russia. As an intimate friend of Karl Radek, the

⁷ HYLAND, P. A Brief Biography of Arthur Ransome, 2013.

<https://www.allthingsransome.net/literary/arbiography.html>

⁸ CHAMBERS, R. The Last Englishman: The Double Life of Arthur Ransome. London: Faber and Faber 2009.

⁹ HYLAND, P. A Brief Biography of Arthur Ransome, 2013.

<https://www.allthingsransome.net/literary/arbiography.html>

Bolshevik Chief of Propaganda, he denied the Red Terror and compared Lenin to Oliver Cromwell. During that time, no English journalist was seen as more controversial or more likely to harm British security. As Arthur Ransome's feelings for Evgenia intensified, he began to offer his services to the British government, both as an unofficial diplomat and as a spy. While he was adept at aligning himself with the most influential party, he insisted on remaining objective.¹⁰

Arthur and Ivy Ransome divorced in 1924 after a difficult process of negotiation, and Arthur married Evgenia on May 8, 1924, at the British Consulate in Reval. Despite trying to keep in touch with his daughter, Tabitha, after the divorce, their relationship fell apart, and they became estranged. Arthur and Evgenia returned to England in February 1925 and settled in the Lake District near the offices of the Manchester Guardian, where Arthur continued to write regular articles, mainly about fishing. He did accept overseas assignments, including returning to Russia and going on a memorable trip to China in 1927-28.¹¹

1.5 The Swallows and Amazons series

Arthur Ransome decided to write "Swallows and Amazons" on March 24, 1929, after spending a few days sailing. As he watched families with children, he kept coming up with new ideas. He had even sketched up the scenario of two boats in which his four (including the baby) would meet another two, characters Nancy and Peggy, who he saw as two girls playing on the shore of the lake when sailing on Coniston. For the first time, he was able to easily divide the story into scenes and even come up with chapter headings. He had a clear vision of the entire book in his mind and just needed to write it down, but he was worried that after so many years of writing more discursive pieces, he wouldn't be able to write a narrative. Ransome enjoyed writing the first chapter but was anxious that it would be the only one he would be able to complete. He couldn't think about anything else and resented every moment he had to devote to other things. Once Ransome had written about 50 pages in a loose-leaf cover, he felt confident enough to try and sell the novel to a publisher. If the

¹⁰ CHAMBERS, R. *The Last Englishman: The Double Life of Arthur Ransome*. London: Faber and Faber 2009.

¹¹ HYLAND, P. *A Brief Biography of Arthur Ransome*, 2013.
<https://www.allthingsransome.net/literary/arbiography.html>

publisher wasn't interested, Ransome knew he could always return to writing for which he knew there was a market.¹²

Publisher Jonathan Cape accepted Arthur Ransome's synopsis and the first 50 pages of his story "Swallows and Amazons." The book was initially released in July 1930 and received positive reviews before being republished in America later that year. After this, Ransome devoted himself to writing adventure novels for young readers, leaving his work for the Manchester Guardian behind. "His style had been refined to Defoe-like functionalism, but he had retained a childlike way of looking at life, reflected in his precise interest in practical"¹³

"Swallows and Amazons was firmly grounded in a fairy – tale structure, children develop skill to use in practical circumstances"¹⁴ The characters are from a middle-class family, are well-mannered, caring, and have a strong sense of social and moral values. Ransome placed his "ordinary children" in what he called "straightforward, possible events, in a world outside the door"¹⁵

"Swallowdale," which was published in October 1931, was the follow-up to "Swallows and Amazons" and featured the same characters, including the Blackett sisters, Nancy and Peggy, who were raised in the Lake District, and the visiting Walker children, John, Susan, Titty, and Roger, who appeared in many of the later books. Nancy Blackett, the girl pirate, is a standout character created by Arthur Ransome and has become a well-known figure in British literature. Adults, aside from the Blackett's kind bachelor uncle, Jim, known as "Captain Flint," are mostly kept in the background throughout the stories. The second book, "Peter Duck," was released in October 1932 and is set in the Caribbean like "Treasure Island."¹⁶ "Winter Holiday" was published in November 1933, followed by "Coot Club" in November 1934. "Winter Holiday" is set in a frozen environment and introduces two new characters, Dick and Dorothea Callum, who are from London. The Callums and a group of local children, including three boatbuilder's sons, are featured in "Coot Club," which is set on the Norfolk Broads. Arthur and Evgenia moved to Pin Mill on the Suffolk coast in 1935, which delayed the release of "Pigeon Post," a gold-prospecting

¹² RANSOME, A. The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome. London : J. Cape, 1976.

¹³ HUNT, P. Arthur Ransome. Boston: Twayne publishers, 1991.

¹⁴ HUNT, P. Children's literature: an illustrated history, 1995

¹⁵ HUNT, P. Arthur Ransome. Boston: Twayne publishers, 1991.

¹⁶ HYLAND, P. A Brief Biography of Arthur Ransome, 2013.

<https://www.allthingsransome.net/literary/arbiography.html>

story set in the Lake District involving all eight of the main child characters, by a year. In 1937, "Pigeon Post" won the Carnegie Medal for the best children's book of the year due to the way Ransome skillfully connected the intricate plot threads. After moving to Suffolk, Ransome bought a seven-ton cutter which he renamed "Nancy Blackett," and his adventures on it inspired him to write "We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea," a North Sea adventure featuring the four Walker children on board "Nancy," which was published in November 1937.¹⁷

"Secret Water," a story set in the islands and inlets of Hamford Water off the coast of Essex, was published in November 1939. "The Big Six," a detective story featuring the Callums and a full cast of local characters, including one of Ransome's infamous "villains," George Owdon, was released in November 1940. "Misse Lee," which was inspired by Ransome's 1927 trip to China and includes glimpses of a disappearing old China, was published a year later. In this story, the children encounter Misse Lee, who is based on the influential figure of the Chinese Revolution, Madam Sun Yat Sen. "Picts and the Martyrs," released in June 1943, takes place in the traditional lake location, and includes many familiar characters, including Ransome's most formidable adult character, the Great Aunt. "In August 1947, his final book, *Great Northern?* was published, set in the Hebrides, and based on a suggestion by Myles North involving the safeguarding of a rare bird-nesting place." (HYLAND, P. 2013)¹⁸

1.6 Retirement

Evgenia and Arthur moved to an apartment in Fulham, London, in 1950, where they lived happily for 13 years. During this period, Ransom's health began to gradually deteriorate. He also wrote some newspaper articles from time to time and worked on his autobiography. He still loved sailing and fishing and enjoyed it if he could. In 1963, Arthur Ransome decided to return to the north, but in 1965 he became seriously ill. "He was transferred to Cheadle Royal Hospital in Manchester, where he passed away on June 3, 1967, at the age of 83. Evgenia died eight years later, and both Arthur and Evgenia are buried in Rusland Churchyard."¹⁹ It is located between Windermere and Coniston Water.

¹⁷ HYLAND, P. A Brief Biography of Arthur Ransome, 2013.

<https://www.allthingsransome.net/literary/arbiography.html>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Arthur Ransome's Biography [online]: <https://arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Arthur-Ransome-Biography.pdf>

The author discovered this site in 1956, in the summer, while exploring the area. While visiting Rusland, Arthur discovered the peaceful and secluded Rusland churchyard, which he decided he would like to be buried in one day. In the meantime, he enjoyed fishing and reveling in his good health. However, by May 1967, it became clear that his health was deteriorating rapidly, and Evgenia moved into the hospital to be with him. Arthur passed away peacefully on June 3, eight days later. As he had wished, he was buried at Rusland, and a memorial service was held at St Martin-in-the-Fields, where Rupert Hart-Davis gave the address. Evgenia died on March 19, 1975 and was buried alongside Arthur at Rusland on a rainy and stormy day.²⁰

²⁰ BROGAN, H. *The life of Arthur Ransome*. London: Pimlico, 1992

2 Swallows and Amazons

2.1 About the book

The Swallows and Amazons book series is a literary series of twelve children's adventure novels written by Arthur Ransome. All 12 parts of the book series take place in England in the period between the First and Second World Wars. The plot deals with the stories of several children who experience many adventures during the school holidays. Mostly the plot revolves around outdoor sports activities, most often sailing.

Many English literary critics believe that this series of novels completely changed the shape of British literature, or rather the shape of British children's literature. In addition, this series included its author in the list of classic British children's authors. Even today, the book series maintains its popularity, making the Lake District and Norfolk, where most of the books take place, popular tourist destinations.

The entire book series consists of 12 individual novels, the thirteenth book remained unfinished due to the death of the author. Specifically, these are books:

1. Swallows and Amazons (1930)
2. Swallowdale (1931)
3. Peter Duck (1932)
4. Winter Holiday (1933)
5. Coot Club (1934)
6. Pigeon Post (1936)
7. We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea (1937)
8. Secret Water (1939)
9. The Big Six (1940)
10. Missee Lee (1941)
11. The Picts and the Martyrs: or Not Welcome At All (1943)
12. Great Northern? (1947)

In this thesis , the first part of the book series, the book Swallows and Amazons, will be analysed. The first book is an introduction to the whole world of the crew of Swallow (siblings John, Susan, Titty and Roger Walker respectively) and the crew of Amazon (sisters Nancy and Peggy Blackett). An interesting fact is that the first part of the book series was translated into the Czech language as „Boj o ostrov“ (The fight for the island)

The Swallows and Amazons book series is interesting mainly due to the fact that it is really very closely connected with the real life of its author, Arthur Ransome, and to a large extent describes his real life experiences and stories. The characters, environment and stories can be linked to real incidents in the life of Arthur Ransome, which contributes very intensively to the atmosphere of absolute authenticity of this book series.

2.2 Main Plot

The Battle for the Island/ Swallows and Amazons is the first part of the book series about Swallows and Amazons. The plot takes place at one of the lakes in the so-called Lake District (Lake District) in north western England, where the Walker siblings (John, Susan, Titty and Roger, who was 7 years old at the time of the first episode and was the youngest of the siblings) arrive with their mother to enjoy the holidays. They stay at the farm called Holly Howe and agree that they can borrow a small sailing boat from the farm, which is named Swallow.

The siblings plan to spend the rest of their vacation on an island in the middle of the lake, which is later named Wildcat Island. The children alone would camp on the island and experience adventures there. In the end, they are all allowed to do so, and so they move to the island together with their sailboat called Swallow. At first, the siblings just enjoy their vacation and freedom, exploring the island's surroundings and the lake. But then two characters, Amazons, suddenly appear on the island. The Amazons are sisters Nancy and Peggy Blackett, who camp on Wildcat Island every year. They have the name Amazon because their sailboat is named Amazon. The Amazons initially consider the Swallows to be invaders who have taken over their island and want to go to war with them, but eventually both camps agree that instead of going to war, they would rather join forces against uncle Jim (aka Captain Flint, aka James Turner), who is the uncle of Amazons. Uncle Jim is a man who lives on a houseboat on the lake, and whom the siblings have previously observed from the island. Seeing a cannon and a parrot on Uncle Jim's houseboat, they assumed he was an old pirate. The Amazons spent a lot of time with their uncle every summer, but this year the uncle is writing a book, he does not have time for them, and according to the girls, he's boring, so the Amazons support the idea that Uncle Jim is a pirate. Nancy and Peggy fire rockets at Uncle Jim on the roof of his houseboat, causing Captain Flint to suspect the Swallow siblings. Both camps, the Swallows and the Amazons, must first agree on which of their ships will be the main attack fleet before the battle with the old pirate. Since the

teams cannot agree, they agree that the winning ship will be the one whose crew can capture their opponents' sailboat first – the Swallows must seize the ship of the Amazons, and the Amazons then the ship of the Swallows. So, the Swallows go to capture the Amazon in the shipyard near the house where the Amazons live. They have to swim across the entire lake and swim a little further along the river that flows into the lake. They have Titty on patrol on the island, who is supposed to turn on the navigation light at night so that the Swallows can drive to the dock in the dark. However, the Amazons expect an attack and hide in the reeds at the mouth of the river. While the Swallows are looking for the Amazon, the Amazons sail to the island. Peggy is to stay on the island and wait for the Swallows to return. Nancy will be hidden somewhere with the Amazon, and then she will easily capture the anchored Swallow. But they are so confused by the light that Titty has lit on the island that they disembark. Titty and the Amazon sail away and hide on a small island. At night, Titty overhears two men hiding something on the island. Meanwhile, the other siblings slept in the boat because they were afraid to sail to the island in the dark. The next morning, they meet Titty on the Amazon. The Amazons surrender and the Swallow becomes the main attack ship, allowing the battle with Captain Flint aka Uncle Jim to begin. But something serious happens. Uncle Jim's houseboat was robbed at night, and Captain Flint suspects the Swallows. His suitcase with the typewriter and the manuscript of the book he had been writing all summer was lost. Fortunately, the uncle believes Nancy, who tells him that the siblings are innocent. The uncle will even come to the island to personally apologize to the Swallows. However, Titty remembers the men who hid something on the island at night, and they all set out to find the buried treasure. They assume it is the lost trunk with Uncle Jim's handwriting on it.

However, they find nothing, so they at least agree with Uncle Jim that they will ambush him again on the houseboat the next day. They win the battle and, in the end, send the captain down the plank into the water. The next day, Titty and Roger go to the island again and after a diligent search, they actually find the treasure (the lost suitcase). Captain Flint is so excited by the discovery of his manuscript that he gives his parrot to Titty. On the last night the children spend on the island, a huge storm hits. The Swallows' tents collapse and everyone spends the night in the Amazons' tent. In the morning, adults arrive on the island to rescue the drenched campers. Everyone says goodbye to each other as their vacation is over.

2.3 Setting

If I focus on the overall setting in which the story takes place, I find that the inspiration comes primarily from the Lake District, where the author spent a good part of his life. As I mentioned in the author's biography, the place he fell in love with when he was younger and eventually settled in later was Coniston Water. However, there are no real names of lakes, settlements or towns in the novel. Even so, I assume that the work is actually set in Coniston Water because that is where the author started writing it. There are many place names in the work, however, that were invented by the children themselves, which I think the author did on purpose to show the children's capacity for imagination and perhaps also to make the readers feel that they were in a world they had never heard of. Whether it's the wildlife or flora surrounding the islands or the setting in which we find the adults, the environments in which the children move are very credibly described.

The mainland

From the point of view of children's characters, the Swallows and Amazons, Mainland is a place where adults and natives live, a place that cannot be trusted and where ordinary life exists. Mainland is actually where the story begins, where the children are waiting for an answer to the letters they wrote to their father. They finally find out that they can set out on their long-planned voyage. The children spend their summer holidays at Holly Howe Farm, where they live with their mother and little sister Vicky. The place where they spend most of their time dreaming that they will one day sail on the lake and arrive to their dream island is called Darien Peak, a place that was named by Titty. It is actually their camping place from which they could see the surrounding lake and islands. Another important place in Mainland is the boathouse, which is under the farm, where children can find a small boat called Swallow. They take possession of the boat and take it on a long-planned voyage to the island.

The island

Island is cut off from the adults both literally and conceptually, it is a world where childhood is pure, where 'let's pretend' is joyful, where exploration and discovery are fascinating, and where each child learns something new. Surprisingly, despite some agitation, there are no fights between the children, with each one exhibiting great respect for the other. On the island, there is a distinct language, and as they begin to map the

2.5 Themes of the Swallow and Amazons series

2.5.1 Friendship and childhood

The novel Swallows and Amazons is full of various topics, subjects, and themes. Since it is primarily a children's adventure book, the main theme of the book is friendship and childhood. The book is therefore highly valued even today, as it still reminds us that childhood can be spent in the fresh air, full of games and adventures. The book could motivate today's children, who are more used to a sedentary way of occupying themselves and remind parents that the most suitable way for children to spend the holidays is to stay outside.

2.5.2 Friendship and love

Another important theme could be friendship and love, whether between siblings or strangers' children. The whole book and individual adventures are a shining example of the fact that friendship is very important for children and can last a lifetime. This is already evident from the acquaintance of the Swallows and the Amazons, when both camps decide that it is better than fighting each other to gather with friends and enjoy the summer holidays in larger numbers, or in a situation where the Swallows are accused of theft by Uncle Jim, but their friends, the Amazons, stand up for them and try to get to the bottom of the mystery.

2.5.3 Sailing and exploration

Important theme that accompanies the entire book series is sailing and exploration. The Swallows love sailing and everything related to ships, as their father is a sailor, and he tries to involve his kids in this hobby from a young age. So do the Amazons who live by the lake, and their uncle (uncle Jim) is a sailor. The whole book is full of motifs related to sailing, seafaring.

2.5.4 Children's fantasy

A theme that is very crucial for a book is **children's fantasy**. Although children experience ordinary and normal holidays at the lake, they are able to live them to the fullest thanks to their imagination, and they can see fantasy elements behind ordinary things and people.

2.5.5 Responsibility and independence

The book also often deals with **responsibility and independence**. Children, although they are young, are not closely watched by their parents and are left with a proper dose of independence and responsibility. This is already evident from the fact that the father allows

the Swallows to stay on the island by themselves and experience their adventures. Likewise, Amazons are not closely guarded, and parents trust them.

2.5.6 Pursuit of goal

A less obvious but not insignificant theme is the **pursuit of a goal**. Walker's goal is to reach the island, and the Amazons' goal is to bring back the friendly Captain Flint. But also, for example, Titty, whose goal is to find the Captain's treasure at any cost.

2.5.7 Imagining doing something real

What is remarkable is the theme of **imagining doing something real**. Children don't dream of flying, becoming invisible or being able to walk on water. Everything they do or plan is real and quite often beneficial to their future, such as sailing, cooking, fishing, camping, etc.

2.6 Motifs

2.6.1 Roleplaying

Children are very committed to the roles they play during their adventures. At the same time, we have children who are the offspring of their parents and are part of a normal family, but at the same time they are part of their fictional ship's crew where they have their assigned roles that they represent. Titty is the only one of the children who plays 3 roles in the story. She is Titty Walker, but she is also Able Seaman and Robinson Crusoe. It is in the passage where Titty is left alone at night on Wild Cat Island that she shows great devotion to the task she has been given, as she refuses her mother's offer to go with her to Holly Howe while not revealing to her mother what the children are up to.

2.6.2 Pirates

An important motif that is very noticeable in the story is the motif of pirates. Titty, in particular, is very knowledgeable in this regard, as she knows many stories about pirates, their lives and the things they did. Titty is the person who notices the thieves who robbed Flint's houseboat and believes that they are pirates who have hidden a treasure full of gold on the island. She then relays this event to Captain Flint and together they all set out to find the treasure on Cormorant Island. One of the situations most reminiscent of pirate stories is the part where, after capturing the houseboat, Captain Flint is forced to walk the plank, as is customary with pirate crews who deal with traitors in this way.

2.6.3 Singing

There are moments in the story when the children sing the familiar songs known as sea shanties. For example, at the beginning of the book when they say goodbye to Mother and youngest sister Vicky, they sing “Spanish Ladies”. After the children get the Captain to walk the plank, they stay on the houseboat with him and sing many songs and dance until they get tired. The last song they sang, which was a fitting end to the voyage, was “Leave Her, Johnny”.

2.6.4 Summer

The adventures of the Swallows and Amazons take place during the summer holidays. Therefore, children have a certain freedom, they enjoy the fact that they can spend their free time undisturbed doing what they like. They are also helped by their kind mother, who accommodates the children and lets them sail towards adventures with the confidence that they can take care of themselves.

'And to think how I've wasted this summer,' said Captain Flint.

(Swallow and Amazons p. 313)

With this statement, the captain is actually communicating that he does not consider his book writing a summer well spent, especially when he could have spent it with the children.

2.6.5 Treasure

There is often a mention of a treasure in the story. The treasure of James Turner, called Captain Flint. The captain's trunk contains his memoirs. One night, however, the captain's houseboat is robbed, and the treasure stolen and hidden on Cormorant Island. Hidden in the trunk is a book that the captain wrote over the summer, which made him so busy and distancing himself from his nieces. The captain suspects Walker of the theft but is later proven wrong. The Walkers help him find the treasure and put it back on the houseboat.

'That's his treasure,' said Titty. 'I knew he was a retired pirate.'

(Swallow and Amazons p. 62)

There are plenty of moments in the novel that reference pirate stories, and it's obvious that the author took inspiration from the book *Treasure Island*, which was a big influence on the future depiction of pirates in modern pop culture. The inspiration is obvious not only because of the buried treasure, but also because of the deserted island, the captain's parrot, or his pseudonym, which is identical to the character of the mysterious pirate Captain Flint.

2.6.6 Naval terms

There are a lot of naval terms in the book, which I think add to the credibility that children are familiar with sailing. This could be due to the fact that their father is an officer of the Royal Navy and from him they learned the basics of sailing.

'Will you take the tiller, mother, while I cast off?' said Captain John.

(Swallow and Amazons p. 28)

Most of these terms refer to the operation of the ship or describe a particular part of the ship. For Example:²⁴

- **Cast-Off:** “To untie, withdraw, and properly stow a line tying a boat to a dock or pier, or to another boat; said of painters, warps, and docklines.”
- **Give Way:** Command to start rowing.
- **Come About, Go About:** To turn to take the wind on the other side of the boat, with the bow going through the wind.
- **Full and By:** “Full is sailing close to the wind, but far enough off the wind to keep the sail full and pulling well. Sailing by the wind is to steer to keep the sail full as the wind shifts, rather than following a straight course.”
- **Sheerstrake:** The topmost plank on a hull.
- **Painter:** “A line in the bows of a boat, used to make fast to a dock or other object, and for light towing.”
- **Put the Helm Up:** “Move the tiller to windward.”
- **Stem:** “A structural member in the bow of the boat extending the keel forward and up, forming the part of the hull farthest forward.”
- **Come up:** “Turn towards the wind.”
- **Dockline:** “A line used to secure a boat to a dock”
- **Handsomely:** To move or act slowly, steadily, and carefully.
- **Hoist Sail:** To raise the sail.

²⁴ Glossary of Sailing Terms <https://www.allthingsransome.net/arboats/sandaboats/sanda2.html>

2.7 Symbols

2.7.1 Blackspot

The blackspot symbolizes Flint's poor judgment when, without direct evidence, he accused Swallows of robbing and meddling with his houseboat. Because of this, the children saw him as a great enemy and an evil native. When it comes to Flint sending a police investigator after the Walker kids, Nancy decides to take matters into her own hands and tip him off to the blackspot. This sets the matter right and Flint comes to apologize to the children and accepts the war the children have declared on him.

2.7.2 Parrot

The Walkers first thought James Turner/Captain Flint was a retired pirate because he had a parrot and a brass cannon.

“He is a pirate,” said Roger. “There’s his parrot.”

(Swallows and Amazons p.37)

The parrot is one of the proofs that Captain Flint is an avid traveler, after all, Peggy Blackett explains how he got the parrot:

“He brought the parrot from Zanzibar. He’s been all over the world. Mother says he was the black sheep of the family when he was young, so he was sent to South America”.

(Swallow and Amazons p. 122)

2.7.3 Swallow and Amazon flags

In my opinion, two flags, although different (Walkers have blue swallow on a white field, and Blackett’s have a skull and crossed bones under it on a black field) are a symbol of children's imagination, playfulness. The flags are at the beginning of the book, before the content depicted crosswise and accompanied by the motto SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS FOREVER! which I think foreshadows their friendship that builds in the story.

The Amazons lowered the oar from their shoulders and set the barrel by the two flags

(Swallow and Amazons p. 123)

2.7.4 Swallow

It seems to me that the small boat Swallow serves the Walkers not only as a means of getting to Wild Cat Island, but also as a thing that evokes a sense of freedom, excitement, adventure.

In the boathouse below the farm there was the Swallow, a sailing-boat, a very little one, and there was also a big, heavy rowing-boat

(Swallow and Amazons p. 16)

At the beginning of the holidays, the children are waiting for their father's answer. They waited and dreamed that one day they would set sail on the lake and go to an island which they had only seen from the train, and which was unreachable for them. However, they are allowed to set sail and the children take possession of a small boat named Swallow, and so their dream becomes a reality. It is thanks to Swallow that this adventurous expedition is possible. The children are excited about it because it allows them to cross the lake and spend the summer on the island. On an island where they're away from the grown-ups and the boring, ordinary life.

2.7.5 Lantern

The children want to spend the night on the island, so they will take a lot of things with them to guarantee a pleasant stay. However, the lantern is very important for them because it serves as a source of light at night and as a beacon to find the island after dark. In this case, it can symbolize hope, happiness, security. And it's the light of the lantern that the Swallows will use to help them win the contest against the Amazons.

They scrambled ashore and unhooked the lanterns from the nails, moored Swallow by lantern light, and by lantern light found their way through the brambles and bushes back to the camp

(Swallow and Amazons p. 138)

2.7.6 Flint's book

A thing that Flint is working hard on and that is making him an enemy in the eyes of his nieces because he no longer spends time with them, does not let them on his houseboat, and does not come across as friendly and nice as he always has. I think this may symbolize a certain passion for a cause that some people who create something have and "lock themselves away" to work undisturbed and let their ideas flow. That's why it seems to me that Captain Flint does not want to be distracted because he only cares about one thing at the moment and that's finishing the book.

“And this year when he came back he said he had a contract and was going to write a book, and all through the summer he's been living in the houseboat, but instead of sailing with us he's in league with the natives”

(Swallow and Amazons p. 122)

2.7.7 Wild Cat Island

The island that the Walker children discover, which they think belongs to them because it was uninhabited when they sailed to it. They soon discover that it has been discovered by the Blacketts and that it bears the name Wild Cat Island. This particular place is a second home for the children and a place that will forever be known as the place where the friendship between the Swallows and Amazons was forged.

“It is called Wild Cat Island. Uncle Jim called it that because it belonged to us. That shows you whose island it is.”

(Swallow and Amazons p. 114)

2.8 Structure

Within a limited time frame, the book has a chronological structure: it is a few days before the end of the summer vacation, and the children's independent experiences are bookended by adult influence.

Ransome occasionally injects an element of mystery into their daily routine of breakfast, bathing, and outings. Nancy and Peggy are introduced in such a way that they are shrouded in mystery, creating intrigue for the reader and extra fun for the kids. To begin, the remains of their fire are discovered on the island, indicating that the children are not completely alone. The girls are then seen from afar with the pirates' skull and crossbones flag. They're clearly a force to be reckoned with, as seen by Nancy's Amazon sailing prowess, which Captain John observed. They then get further closer, shooting an arrow at the campfire, capturing Swallow and leaving a knife behind. However, the reader is aware that they are not in any danger because of the novel's light tone, and when they finally meet, they discover that they are all engaged in the same harmless game. The houseboat burglary incident and James Turner's character are both developed using similar structural techniques.²⁵

²⁵ Swallows and Amazons Cornerstones [online]. Dostupné z: <https://cornerstones--live.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/uploads/2020/03/19160004/Swallows-and-Amazons-Arthur-Ransome.pdf>

2.9 Language

Although the book, or rather the entire book series, is considered children's literature, which should be read primarily by children, the original text is quite complex and demanding. The narration of the story is alternated with a lot of dialogues between children or between children and adults, a lot of descriptions of yachting and boating matters, as well as various professional instructions (such as fish processing, sailing, etc.). The original English text also contains a considerable amount of idioms, slang and colloquialisms expressions, including professional seafaring terms. A rural dialect/dialect of a certain region appears here and there as part of the conversations. In addition, he also likes to personalize the text with poems, songs or song lyrics. It can be said that the language used could seem somewhat outdated to today's reader.

Ransome often mentions things related to British culture in the book. For example, he talks about the Queen and some historical events are also referred to. Another historical figure Ransome mentions is Philip of Spain. He planned an invasion of England in the 16th century, but in 1587 Francis Drake burned his ships before setting sail, and therefore the invasion had to be postponed for a year. He is referenced in Nancy's letter to Captain Flint (uncle Jim), where she confesses to letting a rocket explode on his roof, and at the same time gives him the black seal.

Ransome created his own lands cape, but set it in Britain. Some places are named after his heroes, so in Britain there is at once the city of Rio and the river Amazon. In addition, in the book you can also encounter the use of the original British units, as far as the measurement system is concerned, or with expressive expressions, aka pirate slang.

2.10 Characters

Since the book series Swallows and Amazons is intended for children and is classified as children's adventure or fantasy literature, the main characters are child protagonists. In the very first part of the series, in the book Swallows and Amazons, readers are introduced to two main groups of children, the Swallows and the Amazons.

We meet very few adults in the book. Only a few adult characters are given closer attention in the book. They are mostly mentioned only marginally.

The Swallows

John Walker - John is the oldest of the Walker children. He is estimated to be 12-14 years old. It could be said that he is the most responsible, the smartest and acts as a leader, which is why he is also appointed captain of the Swallow. He learned to sail well from his dad and learned a lot from books. He is the one who manages the entire expedition to the island. I would say that John is very trustworthy, he can act proactively and think about things. An example is, they come to the island, they want to find the best place to anchor. During the course of the story, his character does not change significantly, although his ability to think, reason, and predict well develops, which is well reflected in the planning of the race by the Amazons, which they will eventually win. However, his credibility or his character is questioned by Captain Flint, who accuses him and Walker of setting fireworks for a houseboat.

Susan Walker - Susan is the oldest girl. She is the first mate of the ship and her role is to make sure that the other children are well fed so she mainly takes care of the food preparation and acts as a kind of surrogate mother for the other children. She is in charge of securing supplies, preparing food, clothes and the like. It is important to Susan that the children's environment, whether they are moving or settling in, is welcoming and comfortable. Sometimes children feel like she behaves like a native when she for example forbids Titty or Roger some activities.

Titty Walker – Titty is the next girl in the Walker family. She is an able seaman on the ship. Titty is the most well-read of the children, thanks to which she has a great imagination and can invent different stories and situations, which is especially appreciated by her younger brother Roger. Her imaginative ability comes from reading lot of pirate stories. Titty is the hero in the story because her good judgment and persistence helped the Swallows win against the Amazons in a contest to see which ship would become the flagship, and she also found Captain Flint's treasure on a deserted island.

Roger Walker – Roger, although no longer the youngest in the family is the youngest in the Swallow crew, so the others, especially Susan, make sure he is well fed and adequately clothed. Roger is closest to Titty as he shares her interest in different stories, activities. Although Roger was excited about the idea of going fishing and maybe catching some sharks, he and Titty went looking for the captain's treasure on a deserted island they named Cormorant Island. Roger is very curious, always asking different questions. Over the

summer he will learn to swim. He has the position of lifeguard. He is mainly interested in boat engines and food.

The Amazons

Nancy Blackett - Nancy is the captain of the Amazons, who present themselves as pirates. She is a very capable sailor and is the tallest and wisest of the children. This is especially evident in her speech, which is more sophisticated, probably due to the fact that she is well-read. Nancy proves to be a very loyal friend when she takes justice into her own hands and makes it clear to Captain Flint that he was wrong about John.

Peggy Blackett – Peggy is Nancy's younger sister and holds the position of mate. She is very chatty, which Nancy does not like and has to reprimand her every time. She is very friendly and is the first person to come up with the idea of befriending the Swallows and teaming up against the natives. She always has so much to tell the Swallows, whether it's about different stories or Captain Flint.

Adults

James Turner – This character is supposed to be closely connected with the author of the entire book series, as he is visually very similar to the author. He is a bald man with a moustache who lives on a houseboat, is an ex-sailor, writes books, enjoys fishing and sailing, and having fun with children. Without Uncle Jim, many adventures wouldn't even happen. He is the uncle of the Blackett sisters, and at first the children consider him an enemy. But Captain Flint, as the children call him, changes over time, especially when he learns that he made the mistake of finding the Swallows guilty of attacking the houseboat and stealing its treasure.

Mother – The mother is very kind and loves her children. She stays at Holly Howe, where she cares for the Walker family's youngest addition, Vicky. She's helping the children prepare to leave. She has a very refined sense of humour and loves to join in the children's excitement for adventure. Although she leaves the children unsupervised camping on the island, she checks on them from time to time and, most importantly, learns that they are okay through the adults at Dixons Farm, where the children come for milk every morning. The author dealt with other adults in his books in an interesting way. Although the stories could not take place without the help of parents and other adults, their daily presence and

increased attention was not needed according to the author, and therefore Ransome always cleverly removed them.

In *Swallows and Amazons*, the father of the Swallows is on a business trip in China, and the mother has to take care of little Vicky. Fortunately, the father decides that his children are old enough to camp on the island by themselves. The absence of parents naturally brings more chances for adventure. However, the children regularly inform their mother and visit several times. The other adults are either villagers who help the children and supply them with food, or they are complete strangers, whom the children then imagine as natives or seals in their games.

2.11 Relationship between characters

The series *Swallows and Amazons* promotes values that would be appreciated by conscientious middle-class parents, such as a preference for the countryside over the city and for human or wind power over mechanization. However, despite these positive themes, the series is limited in some ways. When reading about the Walker children and their friends in the series, it may be difficult to believe that they could be so consistently righteous, and it would be interesting to see them in more complex relationships with their parents, rather than just as understanding figures in the background. The series also takes place entirely during vacation time, so there is a lack of insight into the characters' everyday lives. In addition, the older children in the series maintain a sexless friendship that does not reflect the realities of puberty, despite being well into their teens by the end of the series. Furthermore, the series does not delve into personal relationships in any depth. Characters such as the Blacketts' Great Aunt and "Captain Flint" as an uncle are simple figures that belong solely to fiction. Overall, there are few revelations or moments that surprise the reader and reveal that life is richer or stranger than they had imagined. While the *Swallows and Amazons* series has some admirable themes, it is constrained in its portrayal of human relationships and lacks depth in its character development.²⁶

2.12 Innocence of the children

In the first chapter of his book, Victor Watson wonders why Arthur Ransome is frequently described as a realistic writer or criticized for not being realistic enough. Watson believes that realism is not a helpful term because it muddies the waters of critical

²⁶ TOWNSEND, J.R. Written for children. New York, NY : HarperTrophy, 1992

discussion.²⁷ “He is realistic only in the sense that he is a great describer, a painter of word-pictures, with an extraordinary commitment to the faithful representation of the workaday realities of boating or camping”²⁸ Ransome’s creative enterprise is not to represent landscape and childhood as they are but as they may be imaginatively transformed within what is ultimately a Wordsworthian vision.” (Watson, V. p.12)

Swallows and Amazons is based on the concept of novelty. It's a novel about firsts: the first time the Swallows are allowed to camp out, the first time Roger swims outside without touching the ground, and the first time they air after dark. Every peninsula, every canal, every estuary, and every scream is a discovery. Eden is hidden within this story. The children are like Adam and Eve, distinguishing between the brutes and the flowers, and in these moments, reader can find Ransome's writing to be light and honest. The assessments of the countryside and the real worlds of gliding are named in such a way that it comes as a complete surprise to learn that the children's behavior is literally completely fantastical. There is no arguing, no sulking, and no one is always hateful - since the book's gentle symbolism of harmlessness would be compromised by the aforementioned authenticity. Within the world's more open society, minors are their own trusted kin. The Swallows are a four-person hierarchy bonded together by loyalty and morals, with a system based on naval discipline. Captain John and Mate Susan are stern and lack humour, yet they are firm and kind in their dealings with their younger brother and sister, paying attention to both practical problems of health and safety and personal accomplishments such as Roger's swimming. The four children's primary concern is to improve their skills and knowledge, which they accomplish without the interference of their parents. The almost complete absence of adults from children's adventures is frequently observed; this absence emphasizes the special significance of their mother when she visits Titty on the island and they talk about when she was a girl in Australia - mother and child following childhood.²⁹

2.13 Historical Context

The Swallow and Amazons books were written during the era of Retreatism and Advance (1914 – 1945). The Great War, called "the war to end all wars" by some, was directly responsible for more subsequent battles than any other war in history. The Treaty of Versailles, which was supposed to bring Europe lasting peace, prepared the path for

²⁷ WATSON, Victor. Reading series fiction : from Arthur Ransome to Gene Kemp. Routledge, 2000.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ WATSON, Victor. Reading series fiction : from Arthur Ransome to Gene Kemp. Routledge, 2000.

Adolf Hitler. On the Western and Eastern Fronts, the extreme political ideologies of the post war era, fascism, and communism, got stronger and convinced masses. The origins of the Cold War were laid in 1917, when Lenin disposed of Russia's blossoming democracy on the promise of 'Land, Peace, and Bread,' while the post-Soviet clash between Western capital and fundamentalist Islam was sown in the Quai d'Orsay's ham-fisted split of the Middle East. Over 30 million men, or half of the total mobilized, were injured in the war, and lead to the death of 8.5 million soldiers. One way to consider the effect of the war on the popular imagination is to think of the books that were published after the war: T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Philosophicus*, and revolutions in poetry, the novel, and philosophy. In 1919, Hermann Hesse published *Demian*, in which the titular anti-hero states, "Whoever desires to be born must first destroy." The Great War served as a giant revolving door for the most significant writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, and Joseph Conrad were among those who had predicted it. Others, like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, grew up in it and came out fully developed. However, only a small number of writers were willing to look at the actual mechanism of transformation: bombs, gas, and the revolting, inane killing in the trenches. W. B. Yeats removed Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen from the first *Oxford Book of Verse* in 1929. 'Passive suffering is not a theme for poetry,' he famously stated.³⁰

Swallows and Amazons, like its eleven sequels, is firmly rooted in fairy-tale patterns; the children learn skills that they may apply in real-life situations. Although Ransome used unpatronizing working-class children as central characters (especially in *The Big Six* (1940)), these structures help to universalize this secure, middle-class world (the Blacketts have a cook, the Walkers have a nanny, at a time when about 5% of private households had live-in servants). Similarly, his children's characters are challenged, and they are placed in genuine danger, as in the epic crossing of the North Sea in *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea* (1937). *Swallows and Amazons* is set in '1929,' and the series spans around five imaginary years; so, despite his publisher's advice to 'stay away from the [second world] war,' Ransome did not have to do so directly. *Secret Water* (1939), *The Big*

³⁰ CHAMBERS, R. *The Last Englishman: The Double Life of Arthur Ransome*. London: Faber and Faber 2009.

Six (1940), and *The Picts and the Martyrs* (1943), as well as the fantasy *Missee Lee* (1941), were written just before and during the war and can be viewed as allegories.³¹

2.14 Reviews

At first, the book *Swallow and Amazons* did not do well. According to the publisher, it did not have a particularly catchy title. Furthermore, the author was noted for his work as a critic and writer. Positive newspaper reviews aided sales to a large extent. “One of the great charms of this book is its extreme reasonableness. Mr. Ransome is as thoughtful of detail as Defoe” wrote some reviewer in an early review of the book. “Ransome would have appreciated the comparison, for not only had he written about Defoe, he shared his democratic cast of mind, his utilitarianism and pragmatism.” (Hunt,P. Arthur Ransome p. X). Critics generally commended Ransome for his ability to connect with and touch the soul and imagination of children through his writing. He was skilled at creating believable, interesting, and memorable characters and a compelling plot. The characters in his books are realistic and their personalities are clearly depicted, making it easy for readers to get into their minds and identify with them. In particular, the Lake District books may have a strong appeal to children because they allow the reader to imagine themselves as part of the group experiencing adventures such as sailing and camping on an island in the lake. Ransome's attention to detail also adds to the appeal of his stories and helps to make the world he has created feel more real and immersive for the reader.³² “He explains so authoritatively how everything was done — whether it was a matter of seamanship or pitching camp or catching trout or cookery — that the reader is convinced that it happened, and almost that he or she was there at the time.”³³ Furthermore, critics praised the book's natural dialogues, description of the landscape and people, drawn map of the lake, and overall atmosphere. There were, of course, complaints in the reviews. The game for discoverers and sailors is too consistent, according to Mary Crosbie in her review for *The Observer on July 29, 1930*. According to her, it is natural for kids to forget that they are the captain of the ship at times. She admits, though, that these concerns strike the adult reader more. Another piece of criticism, this one in the *Yorkshire Post (August 6, 1930)*, claims that the work has too many irrelevant details and too many professional naval deadlines.

³¹ HUNT, P., BUTTS, Dennis. *Children's literature: an illustrated history*, Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press , 1995

³² TOWNSEND, J.R. *Written for children*. New York, NY : HarperTrophy, 1992

³³ *Ibid.*

Ransom's works have been translated into several languages, and they continue to appear in the publishing house's editorial plans, where they continue to attract new readers. Children want to be the discoverer and go on adventures, and Ransom's books will provide them with just that. Everything his protagonists do is genuine, and the reader feels as though he is there with them. Ransome went back to his childhood because he wrote about what he had always loved. He liked to reminisce about his childhood years also because his mother read him books. And she would pick them out according to whether or not she was personally interested in them.³⁴ “Any book worth reading by children is also worth reading by grown-up persons” (Ransome, A. Autobiography p.35). He said that he wrote his books for himself, rather than for the children, claiming that this is the only way to make a decent book.

2.15 Film adaptation

The new film adaptation of Arthur Ransome's children's classic *Swallows and Amazons* (originally published in 1930 and set in summer 1929) had its world debut on July 24 in 2016 at the Theatre by the Lake in Keswick, one of the most popular towns in the Lake District National Park. The film chronicles the story of the four Walker children — John, Susan, Titty (renamed Tatty in the film), and Roger – and their adventures on and around a Cumbrian Lake, much like the book on which it is based. Philippa Lowthorpe, the film's director, was drawn to the idea because Ransome's book is about 'entering the realm of your own imagination.' She's also aware of how electronics, sitting on your bottoms, and being indoors have become a part of modern childhood. There is not much time for exploration.' The film's central conflict is that it is an indoor activity about the wonders of the outside world as perceived through the eyes of children. The use of a screen to symbolize the Walker children's Lakeland excursions is ironic given that it encourages them to stay inside to reach the outdoors. The novel, on the other hand, does not have the same irony. Books may be taken outside, and for the Walker kids, they appear to belong there. Titty, for example, has memorized parts from *Robinson Crusoe* and uses it as a guide when she finds herself alone on the island. Susan chose *Simple Cooking for Small Households*, while John, the eldest, gets *The Seaman's Handybook and Part Three of The Baltic Pilot*. Their reading material reflects not only their responsibilities in this family structure (adventurer, Captain, ship's mate, and substitute mother, respectively); but also demonstrates how books can serve

³⁴ HUNT, P. Arthur Ransome. Boston: Twayne publishers, 1991

as a bridge between the real world and the imaginative environment created as part of the children's experiences.³⁵

³⁵ Reading and mapping Swallows and Amazons: <http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/dighum/2016/09/13/reading-and-mapping-swallows-and-amazons/>

3 Lake District Authors

The breath-taking scenery of the Lake District has influenced some of England's most well-known writers. The late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Romantic writers, such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, Thomas de Quincey, and John Ruskin, were particularly influenced by their environment. Many children's authors, including Beatrix Potter, Arthur Ransome, and even the creator of Postman Pat, have drawn inspiration from the scenery. Alfred Wainwright, author of many walking guides to the Lake District, is another extremely significant writer on the area.³⁶

3.1 Beatrix Potter

Beatrix Potter was a well-known English author who specialized in children's books. She is the author and illustrator of over 20 children's books. Potter enjoyed sketching animals and making up scenarios in which they appeared. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, published in 1902, was the book that launched her career. Potter had a natural flair for drawing as a child, and one of her favorite topics was animals. She enrolled in the National Art Training School in the late 1870s. Potter began her career as an illustrator, selling some of her work to greeting card companies. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, one of her most renowned writings, began as a letter she addressed to the children of a former governess. This letter was later turned into a book, which Potter self-published. Frederick Warne & Co. released this lovely story to the public in 1902. Their new edition of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was an instant hit with children. More animal adventures came shortly after, including *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* (1903) and *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny* (1904). On many of these early titles, Norman Warne served as her editor. When Warne passed away in 1905, Potter was deeply saddened by the loss. He had proposed to her only a few weeks before his death, but her parents were opposed to the match. In 1905, Potter also purchased Hill Top Farm in the Lake District, where she wrote stories such as "*The Tale of Tom Kitten*" (1907) and "*The Tale of Samuel Whiskers*" (1908). In 1913, she married local lawyer William Heelis. Potter only wrote a few more books after getting married. "*The Fairy Caravan*" was released in 1926, but only in the United States. She felt that the book was too personal to be published

³⁶ Lake District National Park [online]
<https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/visiting/localspecialities/famouswriters>

in the United Kingdom. Her final children's book was "The Tale of Little Pig Robinson" (1930)³⁷

Potter took a liking to the Lake District long before she began her writing career and before she bought Hill Top Farm. However, there was no indication at first that she would settle in the area and become a respected farmer. She first settled in the Lake District with her family when she was 16. Her home became Wray Castle on Lake Windermere. Although there were a few flaws in the castle grounds that made the original owner decide to sell it to the Potters, Beatrix took an immediate liking to the countryside, especially the farms and fells. For her "the most pleasant countryside in the world."³⁸

3.2 Alfred Wainwright

Alfred Wainwright was born in Blackburn, Lancashire, in 1907, and fell in love with the Lake District when he was 23 years old. Later, he relocated to Kendal and dedicated his life to mapping the area, publishing seven guidebooks in the process. Throughout a visit to Orrest Head near Windermere, Wainwright fell in love with the Lake District. By moving to the area in 1941, he was able to adequately examine the nature reserve, and he spent countless hours walking to create his guidebook. Wainwright seemed to have a strong affinity for animals, and he utilized a large portion of the income from his television roles and publications to open a permanent animal sanctuary near Kendal, which was previously created as Kapellan but is now known as "Animal Rescue Cumbria – The Wainwright Shelter".³⁹ His Pictorial Guides to the Lakeland Fells combine gorgeous pen-and-ink illustrations, maps, and reflections in a one-of-a-kind collection. They have 214 fell tops known as 'Wainwrights,' and many walkers enjoy attempting to bag them all! Wainwright died in 1991, and his name is commemorated at the Buttermere church. Haystacks, his favorite mountain, was where his ashes were dispersed over the village.⁴⁰

³⁷ Beatrix Potter Biography. The Biography.com [online]. A&E Television Networks, 2014.

<https://www.biography.com/writer/beatrix-potter>

³⁸ Taylor, J. Beatrix Potter, 1866-1943: the artist and her world, London : F. Warne : the National Trust 1987

³⁹ The Lake District [online]. <https://www.thelakedistrict.org/historical-figures/alfred-wainwright/>

⁴⁰ Lake District National Park [online]

<https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/visiting/localspecialities/famouswriters>

3.3 William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth is a well-known British poet who lived from 1770 to 1850. "I wander'd lonely as a cloud" begins his poem "Daffodils," which is the archetypal Lake District poem. He grew up at Hawkshead and attended school in Cockermouth, close north of the National Park. Wordsworth returned to the Lake District in 1799, to Dove Cottage in Grasmere, and later Rydal Mount in 1813, after attending Cambridge University and residing in Dorset. The early beginnings of widespread tourism to the area were ignited by Wordsworth's 'Guide through the District of the Lakes,' published in 1820.⁴¹

3.4 John Ruskin

From 1819 to 1900, John Ruskin was a well-known Victorian poet, artist, and philosopher of society and conservation. Ruskin, who was born in London, was greatly influenced by his childhood visits to the Lake District. Pre-Raphaelite artists like Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris were affected by his works on architecture and art. He became more involved in politics in the 1850s. He was a firm believer in conservation, the value of planning, smoke-free zones, free schools, and green belts, and he actively promoted them. Ruskin purchased Brantwood near Coniston in 1871 and retired there in 1884. He is buried in the churchyard of Coniston. He was first drawn to the Lake District when he visited Friars Crag on Derwentwater with his family when he was just 5. He used to keep a sketchbook with him to record his studies of nature. In 1871 he became a prominent figure in the fight against the exploitation of the Lake District, and also wrote and spoke out against the destruction of natural beauty.⁴²

3.5 John Cunliffe

John Cunliffe, who was born in 1933, is best known for his Postman Pat novels. Postman Pat's numerous exploits were made into a television series that aired in over 50 countries. For six years, John Cunliffe lived in Kendal and drew inspiration from the surrounding Cumbrian scenery. Greendale was modelled after Longsleddale, while the Greendale post office was modelled after Kendal's Beast Banks post office. The structure, which is now closed, is commemorated by a plaque.⁴³

⁴¹ Lake District National Park [online]

<https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/visiting/localspecialities/famouswriters>

⁴² Taylor, J. Beatrix Potter, 1866-1943: the artist and her world, London : F. Warne : the National Trust 1987

3.6 The influence of the Lake District on the authors

As can be seen from the last paragraphs, many authors who began writing books set in the Lake District fell in love with the area and its landscape or lived in it. However, each author came to write literature in a different way. Beatrix Potter found her talent in illustrating children's books, and her work was influenced by the Lake District environment in which she spent her childhood. Alfred Wainwright visited the Lake District at the age of 23 and fell in love with the area. He then devoted his life to mapping the area around Kendal and Lakeland Fells. William Wordsworth was even born in the Lake District, specifically in Cockermouth. After graduating, he returned to write 'Guide through the District of the Lakes'. This, of course, greatly increased the number of visitors to the area. John Cunliffe lived in Kendal for 6 years and the inspiration for writing Postman Pat stories was the Cumbrian countryside.

⁴³ Lake District National Park [online]
<https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/visiting/localspecialities/famouswriters>

4 The achievement of Arthur Ransome

In the past, children's literature was not highly valued. The Carnegie Medal, which recognizes excellence in children's literature, was not established until 1936, and the National Book Council published its first list of recommended children's literature in 1938. This shows that children's literature was not held in high regard at that time. "It was possible for the bookish child to be far less self-conscious in his choice of reading than he is in the 1970s," says Gillian Avery, an expert on nineteenth-century children's literature, describing her childhood reading in the 1930s. Children's literature was not highly respected due to a lack of knowledge or understanding about it. Even as late as 1948, Ransome experienced the negative attitude towards children's literature held by academia when he was awarded an honorary degree from Durham University, rather than a full degree. This illustrates that children's literature did not have much prestige at the time, and that the academic world had a negative attitude towards it. "Only when Arthur came at the ceremony did he realize that he was going to get only an honorary MA, not being thought worthy of anything greater by the then Professor of English, one Abbott," Brogan wrote of his visit to Durham University to obtain an honorary degree. Ransome had become a well-known and respected figure in literature by the time of his death, and his children's books were considered classics. Children's literature was experiencing a period of increased success and high quality, although it had not yet gained the same level of recognition as it has today. To understand Ransome's impact on the genre, it is necessary to consider the time in which he wrote, as well as his own personal achievements and influence.⁴⁴

4.1 Critics and Buyers

The children's book "Swallows and Amazons" did not immediately become popular. At the time of its release in 1930, there were many other children's books available and the title was considered uninteresting. The author, who was known for his journalism, criticism, and writing about his hobbies of sailing and fishing, was also quite old at the age of 46. However, the book gained popularity in December 1932 after receiving positive reviews in *The Times* and *the Observer* for the author's third book, "Peter Duck". Since its release in 1932, "Swallows and Amazons" has received consistently positive reviews from various critics, including David Garnett, Rosamund Lehmann, M. E. Atkinson, and Mary Treadgold. These reviewers have praised the book effusively, with some even repeating

⁴⁴ HUNT, P. Arthur Ransome. Boston: Twayne publishers, 1991.

similar language in their reviews. The only criticism the book has received is that the characters are too perfect and never argue or cheat. However, the characters' key qualities, such as their loyalty and enthusiasm, make them believable and memorable. Arthur Ransome has a tendency to portray the characters at their best, which adds to their appeal and intrigue for readers. The Death and Glories and the Eels are the key qualities of the Swallows and Amazons' characters. Arthur Ransome's books have enjoyed a long history of publication and popularity in the United States, with both Lippincott and Macmillan publishing his works. These books have consistently been well-received by American children's librarians, but the success of Ransome's work extends far beyond the United States. In fact, his books have been translated into an impressive 12 different languages and have proven to be popular in a wide range of non-English speaking countries. For example, at least half a dozen of Ransome's books have been published in Czech, while seven have been translated into French and five have been published in both Swedish and German. Additionally, at least one of Ransome's books has been published in Norwegian, Danish, Dutch, Icelandic, Finnish, Hungarian, Polish, and Spanish, showcasing the widespread appeal and enduring popularity of his work.⁴⁵

4.2 Children and the Writer

While most children's books that sell well are likely to be enjoyed by their intended audience, it is not always the case that the number of teenage readers directly corresponds to sales. In many cases, parents and librarians are the primary buyers of children's books, which may explain why certain "classic" titles that are considered beneficial or at least safe are continually reprinted. While it is difficult to make generalizations about children's reactions to Arthur Ransome's novels, the results of a competition organized by Jonathan Cape in 1941 provide some insight into how these books were received. During a bombing in London, children were asked to write 250 words about their favorite Arthur Ransome book. "Misset Lee" had just been released, while "The Piets and Martyrs" and "Great Northern" had not yet been written. A nine-year-old girl chose "Misset Lee" as her favorite, while an eight-and-a-half-year-old boy selected "We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea." However, what was most interesting was the report from Mary Tredgold, who stated that out of all the entries, there was no consensus among the children about which book was the best. This

⁴⁵ SHELLEY, Hugh. Arthur Ransome. Bodley Head 1968.

suggests that children agree with the author that all of Ransome's books can be considered part of the same series.⁴⁶

Arthur Ransome's books have been popular with both boys and girls for over 25 years, with millions of readers around the world familiar with the characters and setting of "Swallows and Amazons." The Lake District, with the exception of the areas associated with William Wordsworth, has become known as "Ransome Country," similar to how other regions are associated with particular authors such as Sussex with Belloc, Dorset with Thomas Hardy, and Sheila Kaye-Smith. Elinor Saltus of Arizona University even travelled to Ransome's homeland at the urging of her son, and Ransome told her about how he discovered that navigation markers had been placed on the rocks at Peel/Wild Cat Island following the publication of "Swallows and Amazons." This demonstrates the real-life impact of literature on children, as Ransome also received a letter from a little African girl who believed that he was writing about her own country because she recognized the lake near her home in his descriptions.⁴⁷

"What sort of children are Ransome enthusiasts? Are they, as one would expect, predominantly middle-class?" (Shelley, H. Arthur Ransome p.65). While Ransome did produce letters from working-class schools in northern mining towns showing that his books were popular with students who could not afford a vacation like the ones described in his novels, it is still questionable whether his books are more popular with middle-class children. "I would say however that middle-class admirers are in the majority, and other readers on the decrease." (Shelley, H. Arthur Ransome p.65). According to a survey conducted among London libraries, booksellers, and a group of girls from a South London comprehensive school, it seems that middle-class children make up the majority of Ransome's readers, while interest among other socio-economic groups may be decreasing. However, according to children at a London co-educational preparatory school, middle-class students continue to read Ransome's books with great enthusiasm.⁴⁸

One of the most enjoyable aspects of reading Arthur Ransome's books is his attention to detail and his love of imparting interesting knowledge, even for those who are not particularly skilled in practical tasks. While reading his books, one can learn how to skin a rabbit, catch and smoke eels, use semaphore, assay copper, keep milk cool, lay

⁴⁶ SHELLEY, Hugh. Arthur Ransome. Bodley Head 1968.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

patterns, burn charcoal, create a map, and take flashlight photographs. However, these practical skills are just a bonus to the main appeal of Ransome's books, which is the enduring and memorable characters such as Jim Hawkins, the Bastables, Kay Harker, and the Ruggles, who will secure a place in literature for themselves.⁴⁹ Marcus Crouch has written,⁵⁰ “they are the most unselfconscious of all fictional children. Each is a highly individual person, carefully observed; each grows and develops through contact with the others and with circumstance.” What has contributed to Arthur Ransome's success as an author? It may be that after years of writing for others' enjoyment, he was finally able to write for his own pleasure. In 1937, when asked by an editor to explain his writing process, Ransome wrote a letter to the Junior Bookshelf in which he addressed this question. He responded by quoting Robert Louis Stevenson, the author he admired the most as a boy: “It’s awful fun, boys’ stories; you just indulge the pleasure of your heart...”

“That, it seems to me, is the secret,” is Arthur Ransome’s comment. “You write not for children but for yourself, and if, by good fortune, children enjoy what you enjoy, why then you are a writer of children’s books.... No special credit to you, but simply thumping good luck.” (Shelley, H. Arthur Ransome p.68)

4.3 The impact of Ransom's literary work

The Swallows & Amazons books by Arthur Ransome have had a lasting impact on their readers, influencing the interests and career paths of many people. For example, these books sparked Dame Ellen MacArthur's love of sailing and inspired David Bellamy to advocate for environmental protection. They also provided comfort to Norman Willis during his time as General Secretary of the TUC and motivated Maurice Rowlandson to dedicate his life to organizing children's sailing voyages on the Norfolk Broads. Over 30,000 people participated in these cruises by the turn of the century, and they continue to be popular today.⁵¹

Arthur Ransome’s novels “changed British children’s literature, affected a whole generation’s view of holidays, helped to create the national image of the English Lake District, and added Arthur Ransome’s name to the select list of classic British children’s authors,” (Hunt, P. *Approaching Arthur Ransome*, 1992).

⁴⁹ SHELLEY, Hugh. *Arthur Ransome*. Bodley Head 1968.

⁵⁰ *Chosen for Children*, Library Association, 1957.

⁵¹ Arthur Ransome Trust [online]. 2022. <https://arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk/>

Arthur Ransome was born in the 19th century, and his *Swallows & Amazons* books are set in the 20th century, a time without the conveniences of modern technology like air travel, the internet, and smartphones. Despite this, the books remain relevant today because of their timeless themes about childhood and adolescence, and their celebration of ingenuity and adventure. Ransome's characters face challenges and achieve their goals in a way that teaches readers about the value of rational thinking, teamwork, perseverance, skill development, and tolerance and respect. The characters' outlook is also progressive, inclusive, and based on merit.⁵²

“Ransome presents not so much an ideal world in which children can play, but a world of ideals to which his readers can aspire: a world of equality and respect.” (Hunt, P. *Approaching Arthur Ransome*)

⁵² Arthur Ransome Trust [online]. 2022.<https://arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk/>

5 Conclusion

In the first part of the work, I learned a lot about the author's life, which I divided into several parts, from birth to retirement. Throughout his life the author experienced several difficult life situations such as the death of his father, libel suits, divorce or that he was seen as very controversial because while in Russia he denied the red terror and compared Lenin to Cromwell. Despite all this, the author was able to find peace and began writing a children's book series that started a new phase in his life.

Literary analysis of the book *Swallows and Amazons* was an integral part of the thesis. I found the book to be a good adventure story, in which the main characters have adventures that are believable and in which there is a friendly atmosphere, with no major conflicts and the characters are rewarded for their good deeds.

In terms of themes, motifs, and symbols, they are largely the same throughout the series. If I were to single out the most important themes of the *Swallows and Amazons* stories, it would be sailing, exploration and friendship. What was quite striking was the motif of piracy, which is quite evident in the story and bears some resemblance to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. It is obvious that Ransome was inspired not only by his own experiences when writing the book, but also by stories from other authors.

As for the characters, I was impressed by how much freedom the kids were given, even though they did not have an adult among them for most of the time they spent on the island. I found that's the thing that makes these adventures all the better, because the kids are not interested in spending time with adults they consider boring natives who would only spoil their sense of adventure.

In the third part of the thesis, my aim was to focus on authors who fell in love with the Lake District and spent a reasonable part of their lives in the area, knowing that their literature was influenced by this environment. I learned that The Lake District has been home to many talented and influential authors throughout history. One of the most known was William Wordsworth, known for his poetry and close connection to natural beauty or Beatrix Potter, best known for her beloved children's stories featuring animals such as Peter Rabbit and Squirrel Nutkin. The authors brought even more popularity to the Lake District and brought more tourists to the area.

In the last part of the thesis, I tried to summarize Ransom's contribution to children's literature and the various reactions and criticisms of his works. I learned that after the war children's literature was going through a second golden age in terms of the quality and number of books published, and that Ransome was a major contributor. It can be concluded that the Swallows & Amazons books by Arthur Ransome have had a lasting and significant impact on readers of all ages. These books have inspired individuals to pursue their passions, fight for important causes, and even dedicate their careers to organizing children's sailing voyages. They have also made a significant contribution to British children's literature, shaping the way that holidays and the English Lake District are perceived and establishing Arthur Ransome as a classic children's author. In addition to their historical and cultural significance, the books are also highly regarded for their enduring themes and universal messages about childhood, adventure, and personal growth. Overall, the Swallows & Amazons series is a timeless and valuable resource for readers of all ages, offering lessons about determination, collaboration, and the importance of aspiring to ideals of equality and respect.

The main focus of my work was the life and literary work of Arthur Ransome, who in my opinion does not receive as much attention as he deserves, but nevertheless his work is considered a classic in British literature. Even though his books may already seem very outdated in the 21st century, his contribution to children's interwar literature is invaluable.

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