

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: Pamela Travers and the Mary Poppins Cycle

Some books ostensibly written for children in fact appeal also to adults; they attract both age groups, albeit for different reasons. Such books are mainly in the genre of fantasy (or fairy tales, to use an older designation for the genre). Fantasy fiction consists of stories that are not about the world we know through our physical senses, but about an archetypal world we access through our imagination. Their truth is not literal and limited, but metaphorical and expansive. Because fantasy is archetypal, it is a form particularly adaptable to Theosophical interpretations. Adults will be more likely than children to puzzle out - either consciously or subconsciously - the archetypal metaphors and to expand the meaning of fantasy stories in more sophisticated ways. However, children will appreciate the stories and may absorb the meanings they embody on a subconscious level, which is more powerful than a conscious intellectual understanding.

Pamela Travers, the author of the *Mary Poppins* books, wrote an essay called "Re-storying the Adult" (originally published in the journal *Parabola*, but reprinted in *What the Bee Knows*, pp. 141-4). In this essay, Travers refers to the work of an analytical psychologist, James Hillman, who wrote of the importance of "re-storying the adult." "Re-storying" is retelling stories about one's life experiences as a form of therapy. Travers says, "There are, indeed, books that purport to be written for children that, in fact, do exactly this for the