



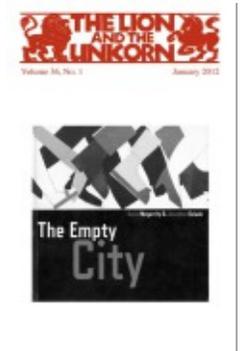
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Waiting in the Hundred Acre Wood: Childhood, Narrative and Time in A. A. Milne's Works for Children

Paul Wake

So they went off together. But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place at the top of the Forest a little boy and his Bear will always be playing.

A. A. Milne, "An Enchanted Place"

Woodbine Meadowlark finds tragedy in the closing lines of A. A. Milne's *The House at Pooh Corner*. As Christopher Robin takes his leave of Pooh at what is to be the end of Milne's career as a writer of children's stories, and consequently the last of the stories set in the Hundred Acre Wood, we are not, he insists, deceived by "the last pitiful sentence of the book, in which Milne asserts that in some sense Pooh and Christopher Robin 'will always be playing'" (Crews 84). Far from it, for Meadowlark "[t]he sentence takes on its full meaning only as we grasp its purpose of providing a counterweight to the inexorable pull of temporality that is dashing Christopher Robin away from us forever" (Crews 84). Somewhat embarrassingly, given that what is to follow takes seriously the functioning of temporality in Milne's work for children, Meadowlark, that "free spirit unfettered by academic routine" is a fictional character, the creation of Frederick C. Crews in his parody of literary criticism *The Pooh Perplex* (1964). The genius of Crews' "casebook" lies in the fact that its observations, about both literary criticism and Winnie-the-Pooh, are extremely well-observed with the effect that, as many critics writing on Milne have pointed out, the subsequent embarrassment of pursuing ideas so effectively parodied has led to a relative paucity of critical studies of Milne's works

for children.¹ But, while Crews selects the Winnie-the-Pooh stories as the subject of his analysis for just the same reasons that led Dorothy Parker to dub their author “Mr. A.A. (‘Whimsy-the-Pooh’) Milne” (437), namely their apparent slightness of both subject matter and style, his argument, through its very successes with the text, foregrounds not the impossibility of discussing the books, nor the ludicrous nature of critical studies, but rather the richly productive possibilities of analyzing children’s fiction. This is not, as Harvey C. Window (another of Crews’ creations) suggests, because Milne’s stories are somehow more than “merely . . . little episodes that will engage the attention of small children” (5), but *precisely because* they are texts for and about children.²

With this in mind, my intention here is to approach Milne’s popular works for children (*When We Were Very Young* [1924], *Winnie-the-Pooh* [1926], *Now We Are Six* [1927], and *The House at Pooh Corner* [1928]) in terms of a temporality that is central to the construction of a childhood that is simultaneously assumed and defined in terms of both the child within the text and the implied reader of the text. As Jacqueline Rose puts it, “[i]f children’s fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp” (2). It might indeed be argued that the child reader can only ever be an implied reader, constructed by, and only existing within (and for) what Seymour Chatman terms the “narrative transaction” (147).

Accordingly, this study will follow the well-established, if occasionally controversial, assertion that childhood is, to quote Philippe Ariès, an “idea,” and a fairly recent one at that, and that it is thus possible to speak of the “discovery of childhood,” perhaps better rephrased in terms of “invention,” (which Ariès locates in the thirteenth century) and that the subsequent “evolution of the themes of childhood” (46), as evidenced by the history of art, clothing, games, and education, is the result of a discourse that has been largely circumscribed by adults. What makes Milne’s work for children so interesting in this respect is that it signals its recognition of the processes by which the childhood “space” is delineated within adult discourse, just as it partakes in the perpetuation of a largely Romantic myth of childhood. As Paula T. Connolly puts it, Milne, “a well-known satirist living during the age of the ‘Beautiful Child’ . . . both deconstructs and reifies notions of Wordsworthian Romanticism in these depictions of childhood” (190).³

Recognizing Milne as an ironist who willfully enters into a perpetually circular position in which the “writing” of childhood presupposes a knowledge of its subject (that can only emerge in the process of that

writing), this article will investigate the necessary connections between language and time as they are deployed in the construction of a version of childhood that is at all points defined in relation to the passage of time. I will proceed by characterizing Milne's vision of childhood as atemporal through a consideration of his verse before going on to consider the possibility of such stasis in relation to the work of Augustine and Paul Ricoeur whereby the connection between the experience of time and the successful deployment of language and narrative begins to emerge. Continuing to explore the connection between language and time I argue that Milne's texts, read here in parallel with commentary on child language acquisition, dramatize the resistance of, and final entry into, the symbolic order of a shared language that instigates the shift from the predominantly spatial world of the young child into the temporally inflected/infected experience of adulthood. Finally, I will go on to suggest that what emerges in Milne's stories is a reversal of Crews'/Meadowlark's claim that temporality is dashing Christopher Robin away from us to the opposite position in which temporality *pulls* Christopher Robin, and the child in general, into a continuity with adulthood that paradoxically demands that it must engage in a temporality that is premised on the fact of its own passage.

From "When" to "Now": A-temporality in Milne's Verse

The connection between childhood and time is immediately suggested by the titles of Milne's *When We Were Very Young* and *Now We Are Six* which, structured as they are around "whens" "weres" and "nows," insist on locating childhood in terms of temporality.⁴ While the "we" common to both collections suggests a level of homogeneity in the experience of a well-heeled Edwardian childhood, they are, as Frank Swinnerton puts it, "verses for and about the children of pleasantly circumscribed parents" (124), the titles suggest a certain divergence in the approach to the construction of the time of childhood. While both function on an obviously nostalgic level the first ("When") figures youth as something belonging to the past, while Milne's 1927 volume is figured in the present, its "Now" locating the collection in a perpetual present and offering a faint, but distinctly audible, echo of Wordsworth's homily to youth "We Are Seven" (1798), a poem which in common with his other verses on childhood reflects an anxiety about the passing of the innocence of youth. Milne's verse answers this apparent disquiet with a nostalgic retreat into a fantasy of an extra or atemporal childhood space that is characterized largely by the domestic space of the nursery. For Wordsworth, whose writings are of a more philosophical, and perhaps more pessimistic, bent than Milne's

avowedly "light verse," this childhood innocence is preserved, if not by a retreat into the pastoral landscape, then by death in infancy. This idea finds its clearest expression in "The Danish Boy" (1799) whose subtitle "a fragment" comments appropriately on the nature of this eternal (unfinished) childhood. Childhood in Wordsworth's poem is sustained in death, "Like a dead Boy he is serene" (131): as Franco Ferruchi puts it, "the child [in Wordsworth's verses] . . . dies in order to not to . . . he dies to re-become a child—an eternal child" (124).

A version of this "eternal child" (re)appears in Milne's verse where childhood is refigured not in terms of the eternal but in terms of an atemporality that places it outside of time and in doing so echoes the Romantic nostalgia of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* (1762):

Love childhood, indulge its sports, its pleasures, its delightful instincts. Who has not sometimes regretted that age when laughter was ever on the lips, and when the heart was always at peace? Why rob these innocents of the joys which pass so quickly, of that precious gift which they cannot abuse? Why fill with bitterness the fleeting days of early childhood, days which will no more return for them than for you? (43)

That Milne too wishes to pause in the pleasures of a childhood that is, for Rousseau at least, defined by its passage, is confirmed in the introduction to *Now We Are Six*, where the reader is informed: "We want you to know that the name of the book doesn't mean that this is us being six all the time, but that it is about as far as we've got at present, and we half think of stopping there" (viii). This "half thought" desire to pause in the "now" of childhood finds its fullest expression in the poems that make up the two volumes as a philosophy of childhood that appears in both the form and content of the poems that make up the two volumes. The clearest expression of Milne's desire, ironic or not, to sustain the Wordsworthian ideal of childhood innocence while rejecting the stasis promised by infant mortality can be seen in the relationship, noted by Thomas Burnett Swann, between Milne's "Forgotten" and Eugene Field's "Little Boy Blue" (1888), both of which concern toys in a nursery awaiting the return of their young owners. "Forgotten" begins:

Lords of the Nursery
Wait in a row,
Five on a the high wall,
And five on the low ;
Big Kings and Little Kings,
Brown Bears and Black,
All of them waiting
Till John comes back. (*Now*, 95)

Field's "Little Boy Blue" begins opens in a world that is already in decay:

The little toy dog is covered with dust,
 But sturdy and stanch he stands;
 And the little toy soldier is red with rust,
 And his musket moulds in his hands.
 Time was when the little toy dog was new,
 And the soldier was passing fair;
 And that was the time when our Little Boy Blue
 Kissed them and put them there. (185–86)

Despite the similarity of this nursery scene, there is a marked difference in the treatment of the theme. As Swann puts it, "John [the child protagonist of Milne's poem] who has been skipping rope and playing ball, returns at night and contentedly goes to bed with his toys. Little Boy Blue, on the other hand, has died; and his toys must wait and wait for the master who never returns" (83–84). While in Field's poem the toys rust, the child they await apparently dead, the return of "John *boy*" [my emphasis], the child of Milne's poem for whom markers of youth are inseparable from his identity, marks the deferral of the passage of youth that perpetuates the child's life in the nursery. This response to Milne's poem is reinforced by allusions to Wordsworth's "Michael" (1800). Just as Michael loses his son Luke to the vices associated with adulthood in the "dissolute city" (109), Milne's "Lords of the Nursery" find themselves caught between a timeless pastoral and an urban loss of innocence,

Some saw the sheep-fold,
 Some saw the mill;
 Some saw the roofs
 Of the little grey town . . .
 And their shadows grew long
 As the sun slipt down. (*Now* 98)

Milne looks to the sheep-fold which, like the nursery, is a site of apparent safety to which return is always desirable and which reappears in a more concrete form, as I will go on to discuss, in the pastoral space of the Hundred Acre Wood.

"The End," the last poem of *Now We Are Six*, which is most definitely not a "concluding" poem, similarly recall's Milne's introduction to that volume to insist on this eternal return of the child:

When I was One,
 I had just begun.

When I was Two,
I was nearly new.

When I was Three
I was hardly me.

When I was Four,
I was not much more.

When I was Five,
I was just alive.

But now I am Six, I'm as clever as clever,
So I think I'll be six now for ever and ever. (102)

On the one hand this is a poem that is entirely concerned with questions of time as its protagonist (E. H. Shepard's illustration is of Christopher Robin) counts through his birthdays. Yet the temporality in this poem lacks a sense of causality; its brief, fragment-like, verses, marked by their insistent repetition of "Whens," suggest nothing more than a series of past instants that remain apparently unconnected. The sense of temporal stasis that emerges in this series of temporal locations appears in the final lines as a desire for an eternal youth; the end-stopped couplet halts the movement of the poem through time as it reaches a "now" that replaces the "was" of the previous four verses, a "now" that is placed in the center of the concluding line, elongating the alexandrine by taking the present, the word now, as caesura, a point at which to pause, in place of the comma of the preceding line. In "The End," the Romantic nostalgia for a past childhood does not simply consign it to the past. Rather, childhood is placed outside of the temporal in a space that is clearly demarcated as being somehow *extra*-temporal, at least in the sense that it belongs to an instant that stands outside of the progression of time. For Rousseau this accurately reflects the child's own concept of time: talking of childhood promises he notes, "when he [the child] promises for the future he promises nothing, and his imagination is as yet incapable of projecting him into the future while he lives in the present" (66).

Milne's exploration of the nature of this childish "present," an "a-temporal present" that I am suggesting is figured as somehow being outside of time, finds perhaps its clearest expression in "Halfway Down," which offers a model of a childhood that is perpetually caught in the "now": between a "were" and a "will be," a past and a present, that is excluded from its identity:

Halfway down the stairs
 Is a stair
 Where I sit.
 There isn't any
 Other stair
 Quite like
 It.
 I'm not at the bottom,
 I'm not at the top;
 So this is the stair
 Where
 I always
 Stop.

Halfway up the stairs
 Isn't up
 And isn't down.
 It isn't in the nursery,
 It isn't in the town.
 And all sorts of funny thoughts
 Run round my head:
 "It isn't really
 anywhere!
 It's somewhere else
 Instead!" (*When* 81)

This childish stoppage, this non-place, which "isn't really anywhere" and which, at the point of its location, is "somewhere else instead" recalls, in spatial rather than temporal terms, Saint Augustine's attempt to account for the notion that the present has no duration in book eleven of *Confessions* where he writes that,

the only time that can be called present is an instant, if we can conceive of such, that cannot be divided even into the most minute fractions, and a point of time as small as this passes so rapidly from the future to the past that its duration is without length. For if its duration were prolonged, it could be divided into past and future. When it is present it has no duration. (266)

Augustine continues, "How, then, do we measure present time, when present time has no duration? It must be measured while it is in the process of passing. It cannot be measured after it has passed, because nothing then exists to be measured" (269). The answer, according to Augustine, lies in the narrating activity that allows time to appear and the move that he makes to place man in opposition with an "eternal" God for whom "nothing is transient" (228) and whose "vision of occurrence is not temporally conditioned" (221) emphasizes the "made" nature of time and the

sense that the perception of time requires its passage: grasping the present relies, in a sense, on memory. As Henri Bergson puts it, “[w]ithout the survival of the past into the present, there would be no duration, but only instantaneity” (*Metaphysics* 45).

According to Paul Ricoeur, who offers a consideration of Augustine's *Confessions* and Aristotle's *Poetics* in the first volume of *Time and Narrative*, “time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience” (3). Like Mikhail Bakhtin, who would write in *The Dialogic Imagination* that “literature's primary mode of representation is temporal” (146), Ricoeur regards narrative as a time-bound form which organizes and interprets events within a temporal framework in order to make them intelligible on what he describes as a “human level.” Ricoeur pursues the hypothesis that narrative is not only always temporal but also that it allows the *only* access to temporality, arguing that “speculation on time is an inconclusive rumination to which narrative activity alone can respond” (6). Similarly Frank Kermode, who also cites Aristotle in his discussion of plotting, describes literary plots as “images of the grand temporal consonance” (17). Thus the experience of time comes to be connected to linguistic, narratological, competence: As Hayden White summarizes, “it would follow that the absence of narrative capacity or a refusal of narrative indicates an absence or refusal of meaning itself” (2). The implications of such a position for a segment of society (children) that is defined, as I will go on to discuss further, by its lack of linguistic competence, are both inevitable and profound. To claim that the child's understanding of the world necessarily moves from the purely bodily to the narratological is, following Ricoeur's conception of narrative, to suggest that the child necessarily comes to apprehend the world, and by extension itself, in relation to a concept of time that is predicated on notions of causality and progression and which must, given that the child is, in legal terms at least, defined in terms of age, entail an awareness that childhood must eventually be abandoned in the very process by which it is identified.⁵

The Child and/in Language

The move from infancy to childhood is, according to Rousseau at least, quite literally defined by the acquisition of language. In book two of *Émile*, as his focus turns to language, he notes that, “we have reached the second phase of life; infancy, strictly so-called, is over; the words *infans* [infant] and *puer* [child] are not synonymous. The latter includes the former, which

means literally ‘the who cannot speak’” (41). The significance of language as a marker of a child’s development is confirmed by the writings of child psychologists and educational theorists such as Jean Piaget and Kieran Egan who, despite the many points of divergence in their work, appear to be in agreement that the child’s progression through each “phase” (Piaget) or “stage” (Egan) is marked by the acquisition of, and increasingly sophisticated deployment of, language. Thus Rousseau’s “*infans*” corresponds closely with Piaget’s “sensory motor period” (birth – 2 years), which is followed by the “pre-operational phase” (2 – 7 years) in which the child’s rudimentary usage of language consists of “monologues” that are markedly egocentric, and which is supplanted by the period of “concrete operations” (7 – 11 years) which is characterized by the loss of the kind of egocentric thinking that defines the pre-operational phase and in which the use of language becomes increasingly sophisticated and socialized (Piaget 2000). In Egan’s model the pre-linguistic “somatic” stage (birth onwards), in which understanding is defined as “the sense of a knowledge from the body, beyond human words” (*Mind* 186), is followed by the “mythic” (4/5 – 9/10 years) and the “romantic” (8/9 – 14/15 years). As with Piaget’s model, the movement between these stages is characterized by an increasingly sophisticated ability to use language.

Egan, who cautions against the level of Piaget’s influence on contemporary educational practice, and who rejects what he sees as Piaget’s emphasis on logico-mathematical thinking, offers a model for education that is marked by the deployment of various levels of narrative understanding, what he terms “metaphorical competence” (*Mind* 50). Indeed Egan’s description of the “move from the mythic to the romantic stage” in terms of “the development of rudimentary but serviceable concepts of ‘otherness’; concepts of historical time, geographical space, physical regularities, logical relationships and causality” (*Development* 28) is closely modelled on narrative theory and draws on the work of, among others, Aristotle, Frank Kermode, and Paul Ricoeur. Rejecting the notion that human experience is “essentially linguistic” (Gadamer 19), Egan argues that “stories should not be considered casual entertainment. They are embodiments of the fundamental structures of the human mind; they reflect and educate us in important ways of making sense of experience, of investing the world with meaning, and of putting world and experience into words” (*Development* 141). While Egan recognizes the implications of the embeddedness of narrative forms in cognitive development which lead to the assertion that “the story form . . . must lie at the heart of all attempts to make the world meaningful to young children” (*Development* 17) he also recognizes that this development must come at a certain cost,

arguing that “it is a serious mistake to view education as an inevitably progressive process . . . while ignoring or neglecting the losses associated with each gain” (*Mind* 97). There is, however, in Egan’s recognition of the necessary losses attendant on a child’s development of non-somatic understanding (i.e., the forms of narrative understanding that he terms variously “mythic,” “romantic,” “philosophic” and “ironic”) none of the nostalgic regret that is found in the Romantic conception of the passage of childhood, a regret that finds perhaps its clearest expression in *Émile* where, in his determination to prolong the “naturalness” of childhood, Rousseau takes a stance that associates the artifice of acquired language with the loss of the natural, primal (somatic) self:

All our languages are the result of art. It has long been a subject of enquiry whether there ever was a natural language common to all; no doubt there is, and it is the language of children before they begin to speak. This language is inarticulate, but it has tone, stress, and meaning. (32)

Taking a position that prefigures the linguistic insights of Ferdinand de Saussure and the later structuralist and post-structuralist work of writers such as Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida, Rousseau goes on to remark that, “languages as they change the symbols, also modify the ideas which the symbols express. Minds are formed by language, thoughts take their colour from its ideas. Reason alone is common to all” (73). Writing over a century later, Henri Bergson, would make a similar observation about the effect of symbols on the experience of time, noting that the adult, linguistic, consciousness “goaded by an insatiable desire to separate, substitutes the symbol for the reality” (128), imposing a rigid temporal framework, which might be characterized as numerical and spatial in nature, on the time of the “fundamental self” that Bergson calls *Durée* and which may be one way of characterizing the temporality of the primal (somatic) space of childhood. It is the time of this fundamental self that Christopher Robin has reluctantly left behind by the end of the Winnie-the-Pooh stories which, as I shall go on to suggest in the following reading of *The House at Pooh Corner*, might well be regarded as a dramatization of the movement from *Durée* to the “concrete” (Bergson, *Time* 128) spatialized time that is inherent in the processes of education and maturation.

The End of Pastoral Time in Winnie-the-Pooh and The House at Pooh Corner

That the Winnie-the-Pooh stories mark a departure from the a-temporal space explored in Milne’s verse is signalled by the opening chapter of

Winnie-the-Pooh which opens with a sense of motion that provides a sharp contrast to the temporal-spatial stasis of “Halfway Down”: “Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin” (1). Time in, and as, motion is now being asserted. When the story proper begins its “Once upon a time, a very long time ago now” (Milne, *Winnie 2*) echoes the ritualized beginning of stories for children that has always, rather perversely, had the appearance of introducing time while effectively locating what follows as outside of the temporal space within which the child-reader might be said to operate. Milne, recognizing this irony, offers an addendum to the storyteller’s cliché: his “very long time ago” is “about last Friday . . .” (*Winnie 2*). This self-reflexive nod at the formalities of storytelling acts with a humour that is suggestive of the manner in which temporality encroaches on Christopher Robin’s world in the stories that follow through a narrative structure that functions by “*dédoublément*” (213), to use Paul de Man’s terminology, in order that they might reflect on their own construction.

Whilst *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* are characterized by an emergent sense of temporality it is a temporality that is repeatedly undermined and which is a somewhat uncomfortable and unwelcome development in the Hundred Acre Wood. The individual stories that make up the two volumes display a marked tendency *not* to progress: Humphrey Carpenter puts this well commenting that, “[i]n a sense there is no ‘story’ as such, only a set of incidents which could be put in almost any order” (202), thus making a helpful distinction between “story” and “incident,” where “story” implies causality and sequence. As a series of “incidents” the *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories resist the kind of causality demanded by Kermode’s conception of narrative in which literary plots are “images of the grand temporal consonance” and for which “the sense of an ending” is a prerequisite for beginning. There is, on the contrary, more often than not, “the sense of the beginning” in the endings of many of the *Pooh* stories—a fact suggested in the conclusion of “We are Introduced” when Christopher Robin, the narratee of the tale, interjects, “Is that the end of the story?” (*Winnie 17*) thereby breaking the “frame” of the story to reveal an ironically *dédoublé* nature that makes apparent the conflict between the a-temporal space of the Hundred Acre Wood and an encroaching causal temporality. Temporality is thus conceived as being external to a childhood world that is usefully conceived of in terms of the enclosed world of the pastoral where that enclosure is both spatial and temporal.

While critics have been quick to connect the “idyllic rural setting” (Wullschläger 184) of the Hundred Acre Wood with Milne’s home on the edge of Ashdown Forest, and to recognize it as “Arcadia evoked in

all its seasons as an English pastoral dream” (Wullschläger 190-91) the pastoral oasis is not simply a green space. As Renato Poglioli puts it, “[p]astoral poetry . . . fixes the pastoral moment, within the category of space as well as of time, as an interval to be chosen at both the proper hour and the right point” (104). Andrew W. Ettin offers further comment on the character of this “pastoral moment”:

The notion of making time pause, even stop, or circle back to the beginning (stretching duration, in other words) is basic to the pastoral instinct for enclosure. Being absorbed in a moment of blessed, privileged time means being settled into an emotionally comfortable experience. Whether attained or not, the desire for that is at the heart of the pastoral. (142)

The sense of Pastoral time as an enclosed and extended space emerges clearly in “Pooh and Piglet hunt,” the third story of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, a literally circular tale that sees Pooh and Piglet trace and retrace their own footsteps around “a small spinney of larch trees” (34). This circularity is emblematic of the two volumes in which the stories are often as much about things *not* happening as they are about things happening as is seen in “Pooh Builds a House” where Pooh, on knocking at Piglet’s door and finding him out, “Waited for Piglet *not* to answer” [my emphasis] (*Winnie* 1). Thus the reader of the two volumes encounters stories about *not* catching Woozles, *not* catching Heffalumps, of building houses that have already been built, and of “expotitions” to nowhere, all of which are punctuated by Pooh’s interminable, inconsequential, and often repetitive, “hums.” Indeed, the success of the “Expotition to the North Pole” is predetermined in that the object sought is defined by the very act of its being found. This is a circular logic that is clear in the message with which Christopher Robin claims (and names) the “North Pole”:

NorTH PoLE
DICSoVERED By
PooH
PooH FouND IT. (*Winnie* 116)

The appeal to the child reader of such stories lies in recognizing the gentle humour that comes at the expense of their protagonists, a move that necessarily entails adopting a position that places the reader outside of both the stories and the a-temporal pastoral space that they occupy. Accordingly, while the *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories are well described by Ettin’s “emotionally comfortable experience” they also dramatize the dissolution of this “moment of blessed, privileged time” (142).

This positioning of the reader *without* the texts is paralleled by the over-arching story of Christopher Robin *within* the texts as it becomes

increasingly apparent that his role is not that of protagonist in but as an observer and interpreter of stories. This movement from character to narratee is demonstrated *within* the text of “Pooh and Piglet Hunt” in which it emerges that Christopher Robin has been watching the “hunt” as it has unfolded from the vantage point of the branches of an oak tree: “ ‘Silly old bear,’ he said, ‘what were you doing? First you went round the spinney twice by yourself, and then Piglet ran after you and you went round again together, and then you were just going round a fourth time . . . ’ ” (Winnie 37). Speaking from this location positions Christopher Robin as a reader of the texts even as he appears within the texts, prefiguring his eventual removal from the world of the Hundred Acre Wood as he comes to be increasingly aligned with the meta-level of the narrating act that generates the stories to which he listens.

While in *Winnie-the-Pooh* the meta-level of the storytelling act recurs in a number of the stories, offering a clear connection between Christopher Robin as both recipient of and character in the stories, “(‘Was that me?’ said Christopher Robin in an awed voice, hardly daring to believe it . . .)” (10), *The House at Pooh Corner* denies this sense of reciprocity. The exclusion of Christopher Robin from the pastoral space of the stories takes place in the introduction, or as Milne puts it “Contradiction,” to *The House at Pooh Corner*, which operates at a meta-level that points to a space “outside” of the stories proper. This section, which announces the end of the stories that will be told about Pooh, introduces on a structural as well as a literal level the removal of Christopher Robin from those stories. It is at this meta-level that the narrator (Milne) and the narratee (Christopher Robin) are able to discuss the stories *as* stories and are able, in their excitement about mathematics, to neglect Pooh who is left to think “Grand Thoughts to himself about Nothing” (*House ix-x*).

Indeed, if *The House at Pooh Corner* might be said to move beyond the “incidents” that constitute its individual chapters toward an identifiable “story” in the sense intended by Carpenter then it is the story of Christopher Robin’s education. Alison Lurie’s comment that “[i]t is Education that will, by the end of *The House at Pooh Corner*, have driven Christopher Robin out of his self-created Eden” (155) is borne out by “Rabbit’s Busy Day,” which takes as its center an absent Christopher Robin. The action concerns Rabbit’s attempts to decipher his cryptic note:

GON OUT
 BACKSON
 BISOY
 BACKSON
 C.R. (*House 75*)

The solution of the enigma comes in the form of a further note that is the perfect expression of Augustine's description of the emergence of present time in relation to the memory of the past and the expectation of the future:

GONE OUT
BACK SOON
C.R. (*House* 88)

Christopher Robin is to be a withdrawal, marked here by the acquisition of a literary competence that is specifically connected with narrating time, to the plane of the narrating act from which he is eventually unable to return as he becomes complicit in the "we" invoked by Milne's "No, you see, we have lost it . . ." (*House* x). Christopher Robin appears to respond to the imposition of time that is inherent in this alignment with the adult-narrator when he tells Pooh,

"I'm not going to do Nothing any more."
"Never again?"
"Well, not so much. They don't let you." (*House* 174–75)

In other words, it is in the assimilation into this somewhat ominous-sounding "They" that facilitates both the appearance of childhood, as a concept that can be grasped and exchanged, and the necessity that childhood, defined as that which pre-exists the "They," disappears.

The figuration of Christopher Robin as both a character within the stories and as an emergent reader (and occasional writer) of those stories emphasizes the distance between the level of the stories (what I have described as an atemporal pastoral space) and the level of their narration. The reader's recognition of this distinction, which comes with the internalizing of the narrating act, generates the possibility of an understanding that is well described as "ironic." As Egan puts it, describing the stage of understanding that announces for him emergent adulthood: "The ironic mind . . . is interested in what ways the mind's imposing order on, or making sense of, the world interferes with what is actually true about it" (*Development* 84). In its emphasis on the discrepancy between word and world, Egan's model of irony is closely allied to that of the Jena Romantics, demanding a self-reflexive awareness that is well described by Friedrich Schlegel as the "clear consciousness of eternal agility" (Wheeler 56). Moreover, Egan's description of ironic understanding clearly recognizes narrative as a form of sense-making that is imposed on the world and which is all but inescapable. As Barthes famously remarked, "narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself" (78).

The essential irony that appears in Milne's fiction through the doubling of perspective common to ironic discourse is that while narrative allows the appearance of the child, it is narration that is at all points connected with temporality, which guarantees that the child as it appears in literature is necessarily constructed in terms that entail its passage. Nostalgia, in the sense of retrospection, is inevitable. Crews'/Meadowlark's claim that temporality is dashing Christopher Robin away from us masks the process by which the child is recognized, or more properly speaking defined (in a process that is rather like Pooh's "discovery" and "finding" of the North Pole), in a temporally-inflected discourse that can only grasp its object as a past object. The space of the Hundred Acre Wood has become "a remembered rather than present place" (Connolly 191) that is accessible only from, and as part of, this meta-level and it is the process of remembering, or refiguring, that guarantees this loss; as Christopher Robin puts it, "I do remember, and then when I try to remember, I forget." (Milne, *Winnie* 17).

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Notes

¹ Noting the lack of critical work on Winnie-the-Pooh, Peter Hunt, remarked in 2001: "Milne and Pooh have been magnificently served by two books which are models of their kind, both by Ann Thwaite: a biography, *A. A. Milne, His Life*, and a literary and sociological compendium, *The Brilliant Career of Winnie-the-Pooh*. We wait upon a volume of criticism that can rise to these heights" (102–03). For further commentary on the influence of Crews on subsequent criticism see Benedict Nightingale's review of *The Pooh Perplex* in *The Guardian*, 18 Mar. 1964; Ann Thwaite, *A. A. Milne* (1990), 301–02; Alison Lurie, *Don't Tell The Grown Ups* (1990), 145–46; and Jackie Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland* (1996), 198.

² As Tom Payne remarks in relation to Crews' sequel, *Postmodern Pooh* (2001), Crews "has fashioned arguments that are loopy for sure, but work" (Lezard).

³ Similarly Jackie Wullschläger notes that "Pooh's forest is . . . shot through with irony," before going on to conclude that "With Milne, the cult of the innocent child was over" (178, 186).

⁴The title of Milne's first book for children, *Once Upon a Time* (1917), has a similar sense of contradictory impulses of a childhood that is figured as outside of "our" time and the centrality of time in the construction of narratives.

⁵See, for example, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990), published by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and ratified by the majority of member nation states of the United Nations in 1989, which opens with the statement that: "For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."

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