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HAPPILY EVER AFTER?
AMBIGUOUS CLOSURE IN MODERNIST CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Marcie Panutsos Rován

May 2016

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Marcie Panutsos Rován

2016

HAPPILY EVER AFTER?
AMBIGUOUS CLOSURE IN MODERNIST CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

By

Marcie Panutsos Rovan

Approved February 23, 2016

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ABSTRACT

HAPPILY EVER AFTER?

AMBIGUOUS CLOSURE IN MODERNIST CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

By

Marcie Panutsos Rován

May 2016

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Linda Kinnahan

This study explores the fruitful interchanges between modernist literary technique, the culture of modernity, and children's literature. While some recent scholarship has examined works that modernist authors like Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, and Cummings produced for child readers, modernist children's literature remains a largely neglected field. Examining texts by A.A. Milne, Gertrude Stein, and J.M. Barrie through the lens of literary modernism, this project explicates how these authors adapt modernist techniques, ideologies, and preoccupations in their writing for children. Focusing on themes of alienation, disillusionment, memory, imagination, gender construction, child development, and the disruption of Arcadian myths, I argue that these texts adopt modernist techniques to explore, uphold, or challenge modernity's construction of the child. Embracing modernist indeterminacy and ambiguity, these texts directly engage

with constructions of childhood as a mode of modernist experimentation.

Recontextualizing these children's works in the context of literary modernism reveals how the two genres are symbiotically related, thereby broadening our understanding of literary culture and discourses of childhood in the early twentieth century.

DEDICATION

To Aaron James Rován, my partner, best friend, inspiration, emotional support,
and unofficial editor.

I could not have done this without you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This project would not have been possible without the support of many people. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my parents for inspiring me to never stop learning, my Nana for always having faith in me, and my friends and sisters for their emotional support and for pressuring me to keep on working. I would like to thank Dr. Anne Brannen for helping me to explore my interests in this fascinating new area of literary study. I would like to thank the members of my committee for their encouragement, their insightful feedback, and their patience and support. I would like to thank my graduate student colleagues, especially Melissa Wehler and Amy Criniti Phillips for showing me there is a light at the end of the tunnel and offering emotional support. I would especially like to thank Aaron Rovin and Jessica Blissit for helping me to work through some of the rough patches and clean things up before subjecting my committee members to certain chapters. And a final thank you to the countless friends, colleagues, family members, and mentors who have helped me to reach this point.

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Introduction

Historically, critics have taken for granted that a clear separation exists between the fields of children's literature and modernist literature. Although the temporal boundaries of literary modernism and the "golden age" of children's literature overlap, many scholars regard the two fields as diametrically opposed responses to the same set of historical circumstances. And yet, both genres respond to cultural changes resulting from the industrialization, urbanization, immigration, commodification, and mass production of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Both also react to the unimaginable violence of World War I and the increased emphasis on the unconscious brought about by the revolutionary work of Sigmund Freud and others in the field of psychoanalysis. The same cultural forces helped to shape developments in both literary modernism and golden age children's literature. Some work has been done to examine the intersections of these fields; however, the bulk of literary criticism to date insists that while modernist literature directly engages with the changes and uncertainties of modern society, children's literature of this era reflects a desire to escape from the modern world and retreat to an innocent and idyllic Arcadia.¹ Children's literature is considered regressive, whereas modernist literature is thought to be progressive.

Recently, there has been a notable shift towards an integration of these two fields. Scholars have begun to identify overlaps and parallels between children's literature and modernist literature. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* even dedicated a special 2007 issue to an investigation of the productive intersections between the two fields. In "Modernism," Kimberley Reynolds outlines many of the specific correlations

¹ Humphrey Carpenter's *Secret Gardens: The Golden Age in Children's Literature* offers a clear articulation of this escapist view of children's literature.

between literary modernism and children's literature, pointing primarily to the ways in which many children's texts of the modernist era express a self-conscious concern with the nature of writing, concerns over the problematic relationship between language and meaning, a preoccupation with the destabilizing forces of science and technology, and a rejection of the tenets of realism (particularly chronological linearity). Children's literature is not only responding to the same cultural phenomena as literary modernism, but children's texts actually rely on many of the same formal techniques and explore the same existential questions as modernist texts.

Following in the footsteps of Lewis Carroll, whom Juliet Dusinberre and others consider to be a forebearer of literary modernism, many children's authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century experimented with radical content and innovative forms. P.L. Travers, Oscar Wilde, E. Nesbit, John Masefield, James Barrie, Astrid Lindgren, and other children's authors of the era pushed the boundaries of what was considered acceptable for children by exploring complex issues of self-perception and the individual's struggle to make sense of a chaotic modern world. Picture book authors, like Wanda Gag and A.A. Milne, experimented with the genre's potential for heteroglossia by exploring the interrelationship between words and images. Beyond these specific experimentations with modernist ideas and techniques, the fields of children's literature and modernist literature also share several authors. Many well-respected modernist figures published texts for children in their lifetimes—including: T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, Langston Hughes' *Popo and Fifina*, E.E. Cummings' *Hist Whist and Other Poems*, H.D.'s *The Hedgehog*, and Gertrude Stein's *The World Is*

Round, among others.² The publications by these authors further complicate the idea of a strict separation between the two fields.

The productive intersections between modernist literature and children's literature and culture have led to innovations in both fields. The influence of children's perspectives on modernist literature (and painting) is widely acknowledged. Henry James, despite his dismissive attitude toward child readers, chose to center one of his adult novels (*What Maisie Knew*) on the problem of the inaccessible mind of a child. Other authors, like Henry Roth (*Call It Sleep*), Virginia Woolf (*To the Lighthouse*), Mina Loy (*Anglo Mongrels and the Rose*), and James Joyce (*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), demonstrate a deep interest in children's minds and experiences. These texts have, in turn, contributed to the growing interest in children and childhood that dominated the period. Other modernists, like Cummings, took inspiration from children's perspectives, trying to emulate what they perceive as the child's more direct and intuitive way of experiencing life. Some modernist artists, such as Wassily Kandinsky and Roger Fry, even tried to reproduce elements of children's drawings in their own art. They believed that children have a fresh, unschooled perspective and the ability to present imaginative impressions. For these reasons, many modernist artists and poets were often accused of "childishness" (Picasso, Stein) or of producing "babyish nonsense" (Cummings), indicating a direct association between the perspectives and sensibilities of modernist artists and the presumed perspectives of children.

Recent scholars have begun to investigate connections between the fields of modernism and children's literature at the turn of the century; however, the majority of

² Others, like James Joyce (*The Cat and the Devil*) and Virginia Woolf (*Nurse Lugton's Curtain*) also wrote texts for children, but chose not to publish them.

these studies operate in one direction only. Scholars like Dusi Berre, Nathalie Op de Beeck, and Jonathan Fineberg, Ann Martin, and Joshua Esty have demonstrated the influence of real or imagined children on modernist art and literature, but few scholars have explored the influence of modernism on children's texts. Children's literature remains a critically neglected area of literary modernism. As such, I argue for a redrawing of the boundaries to include relevant children's fiction under the purview of literary modernism, in order to better understand the experiments and ideologies inherent within these texts. By granting these texts the same cultural authority as more highly regarded modernist texts, we gain a fuller picture of modernist innovation and its effects on literature.

While the modernist era generated many simplistic children's stories and derivatives of sentimental narratives, it also produced many more complex and innovative stories. Many children's texts of the period reflect a loss of faith, a rejection of Victorian narrative conventions, an engagement in linguistic experimentation and play, a multiplication of perspectives, a loss of stability or certainty, and an increasingly complex understanding of the world. They often disrupt linearity, subjugate meaning to sound, resist certainty, and refuse narrative closure. The children in these texts rebel against earlier conventions of morality and propriety, experience time subjectively, reject gender ideologies, and express uncertainty about what is real and what is imaginary. They are often searching for a stable self-concept, usually without success, and trying to make sense of a confusing modern world. While some of these characteristics are also prevalent in Victorian representations of childhood, the shifts in both the material conditions of childhood and the cultural formations of childhood in the modernist era

contributed to the development of a more experimental and more complex literature for children.

In “Ideology and the Children’s Book,” Peter Hollindale insists on recognition of both the inevitability and the value of ambiguity, complexity, and fragmentation in children’s literature. The complex and often questionable materials within golden age children’s literature are part of the reason that these texts have endured. Modernist children’s authors recognized the value of ambiguity and self-doubt and consciously incorporated the complex issues and devices of modernism into their texts for children. Rejecting the strictures of didactic and moralistic children’s literature, these authors provided children with experiences in the fantastic and direct exposure to the uncertainties and ambiguities of the real world. Far from being “simplistic,” these texts demonstrate the same complexities and experimentation as the canonized texts of modernist literature.

Texts intended for children have much in common with those intended for adults in the same period, and literary criticism needs to explore these correlations more fully with respect to children’s literature of the modernist era. Children’s literature is rarely as safe, idyllic, and repressive as critics like Humphrey Carpenter have argued. In reality, children’s literature can be as complicated, unsettling, and ideologically complex as any other kind of literature. Marah Gubar and others have demonstrated this with respect to Victorian children’s literature, but there remains a persistent misconception of “the golden age” of children’s literature as a period of regressive, escapist, and innocently naïve fiction for children. A closer look at the texts themselves will disprove this assumption and acknowledge the complexity and innovation inherent within many of the

texts of this period. While critics have begun to acknowledge the intersections between golden age children's literature and literary modernism, more work needs to be done to examine the modernist innovations and ideals within specific children's texts. Rather than simply conceding that correspondences exist, scholars need to grant modernist children's texts the same individual attention that they would give to works by Stein or Joyce to see how particular children's texts contribute to the landscape of literary modernism.

This study will disregard the artificial boundary between children's literature and modernist literature in order to explore the fruitful interchanges between modernist literature, the culture of modernity, and children's literature. This project seeks to extend the work of critics like Reynolds and Gubar, who have begun to unravel false perceptions about the simplicity of children's literature. Specifically, this study will focus on children's texts whose authors use modernist techniques to explore discourses of "childhood" and the "the child" at the turn of the century, an era often considered in terms of a new culture of childhood or "the cult of the child." The authors I have selected adopt modernist literary techniques and themes as a way of exploring, upholding, or challenging different aspects of modernity's construction of the child. Embracing modernist indeterminacy and ambiguity, they sometimes both reinforce and undermine these constructions within the same text. Though they are ostensibly written for children, these texts directly engage with constructions of childhood as a mode of modernist experimentation.

This study centers on several classic works of children's literature (*Peter and Wendy* by J. M. Barrie and *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* by A.A.

Milne) and a children's text produced by a major modernist figure (*The World is Round* by Gertrude Stein). A close examination of the modernist conventions and sensibilities present within these texts will demonstrate how some children's authors of the modernist era directly engaged with both the formal innovations and the radical subject matter of mainstream modernism to explore shifting discourses of childhood. Responding to changes in the material and cultural formations of childhood at the turn of the century, these texts challenge and expand contemporary discourses of childhood and child development and call attention to the interrelations between modernism, children's literature, and the burgeoning fields of child study and child psychology.

Modernist authors and artists recognized the revolutionary potential of children's culture. Roger Fry valued children's perspectives because "he found in children a capacity to observe without interpreting" (Dusinberre 26). Robert Louis Stevenson admired "the child's capacity for belief," which he found to be "infinitely greater than the adult's because every aspect of his experience tests it" (Dusinberre 193). Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb observe that "childhood offered an escape from the already said" (102) and explain that "a number of writers approach the task of writing for children as an attempt to find a language that rejects the rational and conventional, in order to 'make it new'" (105). Reynolds similarly argues that childhood held a special appeal for modernists because "the logic of dreams, fantasy, play, and the imaginary, all associated with the young, is seen to be more permeable and plastic than the rationality assigned to adulthood" (*Radical* 16). Reynolds extrapolates from this to suggest that child readers do not require the same level of justification for "some of the more extreme ideas and positions associated with modernism, the avant-garde, and the absurd" (*Radical* 60). For

all of these reasons, children's literature proves a fruitful ground for modernist experimentation.

While most definitions of modernism do not explicitly exclude children's literature, assumptions about complexity have often led to a critical disregard of texts intended for children. Current scholarship has offered analysis for some of the specific children's texts produced by major modernist figures; however, such scholarship tends towards one of two conclusions: either the work is considered an anomaly of children's literature that would not be appropriate for any "real" child or the work is considered to be of inferior quality to texts by the same author that were intended for adults. This conclusion relies on the false assumption that children's work can only be so complex before it ceases to be children's literature. Sue Walsh summarizes this critical assumption in declaring that "language that is regarded as 'arty' is read as 'adult' and language that is regarded as 'simple' and 'natural' is read as 'childlike' and/or appropriate to the 'child'" (29-30). The assumption of a child's inability to understand literary complexity has been challenged for over a century, as Sally Shuttleworth demonstrates in her detailed history of the child study movement, but its influence persists in contemporary literary criticism. Analysis of a few representative children's texts (by Milne, Stein, and Barrie), will demonstrate that complexity and innovation are not antithetical to children's literature. This project seeks to expand current thinking about the boundaries of modernist literature to include literature not originally intended for an adult audience and to articulate how modernist children's literature grows out of and differs from that which precedes it.

An examination of innovative children's texts produced during the late 19th and early 20th century will show how the larger cultural forces that shaped mainstream modernism affected children's literature. By focusing on the work of Milne, Stein, and Barrie, this project investigates changes to narrative structure, shifting gender dynamics, genre-blending, and the pervasive focus on the interiority of the child to understand how these developments reflect the cultural anxieties and uncertainties of the modernist era. I am not arguing that all children's literature produced in this era should fall under the umbrella of literary modernism, any more than one would argue that all texts written for adults in this era should. Rather, I will demonstrate that our understanding of children's literature is limited by misconceptions of its simplicity and that some children's texts ought to be considered as part of this larger literary movement.

This study will go beyond the popular understanding of the shift from didacticism to entertainment in children's literature at the turn of the century in order to explore differences in narration and narrative progression as well as in conceptions of childhood. The ambivalence, ambiguity, and disruptions in narrative that are prevalent in children's literature of the modernist era suggest a strong correspondence between this shift away from narrative certainty and the larger cultural anxieties of the period. Within the cultural context of modernity, these changing conceptions of childhood contributed to formal developments in children's literature. Authors borrowed techniques from literary modernism to reflect these cultural uncertainties in their children's stories.

Concepts of childhood and "the child" underwent a radical shift during the late 19th and early 20th century in both Great Britain and the United States. Changes in child labor laws, compulsory education laws, laws preventing cruelty to children and

criminalizing child sexual abuse, and the development of separate juvenile court systems reflected a growing shift in the way society viewed children (Jabour). Large organizations began actively lobbying for children's rights and the protection of childhood. Acknowledging the new focus on children's welfare, Linda Gordon asserts that "Child abuse was 'discovered' in the 1870s" (269). These various legal reforms point to the overwhelming shift in public sentiment with regard to childhood. The Victorian era is generally credited with first recognizing children as separate from adults and in need of their own distinct literature, but not until the turn of the century did society widely accept the idea that children also required protection from adults and begin to pass legislation to that effect.

The growing recognition of the abuses, violations, poverty, and exploitation of children (embodied in the Progressive rhetoric of a "right to childhood") may have contributed to the increasingly dark interiority of child characters within children's literature of the time and was certainly a factor in many authors' decisions to remove child characters from the adult world, transporting them to an Arcadia, a Neverland, or a Hundred Acre Wood ostensibly free from adult influence. The very idea of protected childhood was based on the recognition of unprotected childhood. This recognition encouraged the development of texts that sought to prepare child readers for the complexities, dangers, and uncertainties of modern society. The narrative instability in texts like *Peter and Wendy* and *The World is Round* reflects these cultural anxieties.

Changing conceptions of childhood and children's needs were furthered by significant developments in the fields of psychology and educational theory. Turn-of-the-century society began to regard children as developing individuals, who were in the

process of growing into unique adults. In the educational field, the advent of Montessori schools brought with it a new emphasis on children's self-construction. Psychology also shifted perceptions of childhood, highlighting the importance of childhood development in later life. Though many of Freud's theories regarding childhood sexuality were highly controversial and considered suspect, his work did set forth a new emphasis on child psychology and the inner-workings of the child mind. These various discoveries and theories all contributed to a new understanding of the child as being "in-process" and needing the proper balance of nurture and liberty to develop into a well-adjusted adult. By the 1890s, parents could turn to large numbers of "scientific, educational, and literary texts" and periodicals for advice on how best to nurture their children's development (Shuttleworth 271). Ellen Key's influential 1900 text declared in its title "the arrival of *The Century of the Child*" (Shuttleworth 355). Key based her declaration, in part, on "the far greater attention being paid to the child in the educational and social spheres" (Shuttleworth 355). The turn of the century marked a growing preoccupation with children's educational and psychological development.

Theories of child development and education in this era—particularly those of Friedrich Froebel, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Sigmund Freud, and Maria Montessori—provide insight into conceptions of childhood and the child mind in the modernist era. These theories were popularized through parenting magazines and other mass cultural forms. They also contributed to decisions by children's librarians and public schools as to what literature was best suited for children's developing minds. Because these theories were so widely disseminated, they inevitably affected portrayals of children in modernist literature – both in texts written for adults and for children. Whether authors accepted or

sought to challenge these theories, they could not ignore the pervasive shifts in cultural formations of childhood. Children's literature of this period, in particular, reflects and responds to these larger cultural changes. Because children's literature is, almost invariably, written and produced *by* adults *for* children, an understanding of adult conceptions of "the child" and the developmental needs of childhood is crucial in any analysis of children's texts. The authors in this study seem to engage directly with many of these theories in their interrogations of contemporary constructions of childhood.

The shifting conceptions of childhood and the increasing anxieties about child development during the modernist era contributed to a new complexity in children's literature. Authors conventionally characterize golden age children's literature as peaceful, simplistic, and idealistic—an escape from the pressures of modern life into a pastoral utopia. In her explanation of golden age fiction, Jackie Wullschläger describes such fiction as taking place in "a secure, prosperous, optimistic country" (17). She further notes that these settings "all also celebrate escape, the flight into an unreal dream world...the regressive desire for a pre-industrial, rural world and the identification of the child with purity, a pre-sexual life, moral simplicity" (17). Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries make a similar claim in their introduction to *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction*, declaring that "the concept of childhood, too, became a symbolic counterweight to the urbanized, pressurized, anarchic stresses of modern life and a civilization felt to be in decline" (2). Observing that "the period's fictional children tend to exist in idyllic surroundings" (Gavin and Humphries 3), they attribute this trend to a desire to escape modern life and "the tendency to idealize childhood" in this period (3). Marilynn Strasser Olson extends this discussion of the idealization of childhood to insist

that “many decadent artists” in this period “creat[ed] worlds in which death or change is written out” (2).³ These characterizations all rely on a false conception of the simplicity and optimism of golden age texts.

Golden age children’s texts are actually far more complex and less idealistic than they may initially appear. Many such texts set up a false expectation of Arcadian escape, while undermining the very fantasy world they have created by calling attention to its problems or its artifice. The fragmentation, existential anxieties, and narrative experimentation within these texts reflect the changing discourse of childhood in the modernist era. Modernist innovations create a space for authors to interrogate popular conceptions of “the child” and to challenge traditional narratives of childhood. Rather than offering an escape from modern anxieties to a peaceful, simple, and charming Arcadia, golden age children’s authors challenge the very concept of such an escape. The representative texts that I have selected demonstrate the problems inherent in Arcadia and challenge the idea of a “happily ever after.”

The first chapter, “In Which We Learn that Fantasies Cannot Last and Children Must Outgrow Them” focuses on A.A. Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*. Before turning to children’s literature, Milne was known primarily as a humorist, and the Pooh stories embody elements of his satirical treatment of human foibles. Milne’s Pooh stories draw on the nonsense tradition to call attention to the absurdities of language, logic, and human nature and reflect the author’s disillusionment with authority. Like many golden age children’s classics, Milne’s stories have faced contradictory criticism; some critics assert that the texts are too sentimental and naïve to

³ Olson ironically chooses as her example, *Peter Pan*, a text which I will show actually demonstrates an intense preoccupation with death.

be worthy of serious study, while others insist that they are too complex and sophisticated to be aimed at an audience of children. Critics argue that the stories are not really intended for child readers because the humor of Milne's stories often relies on irony and occasional cynicism; however, they remain an acknowledged classic of children's literature.

Milne's satirical comic style, his cynical critique of modern society, and the disillusionment he experienced in the wake of World War I influenced his writing for children. Beyond these thematic connections to modernism, Milne's texts also reflect his experiments with modernist aesthetics. On their surface, the Pooh texts seem to provide sweet, simple narratives of the imaginative adventures of a boy and his toys in their own personal Arcadia. Closer inspection, however, reveals experiments with language, narrative construction, and generic expectations that challenge the boundaries between imagination and reality. His stories call attention to their own artifice while also playing with conventions of realism. His experiments with narrative reflect the fragmentation, self-consciousness, and self-reflexivity characteristic of mainstream modernism. By presenting multiple, conflicting viewpoints, focusing on the interiority of multiple characters, and utilizing his illustrations to provide an alternative commentary on the text, Milne demonstrates his engagement with both the ideologies and experimental techniques of modernist literature.

In his treatment of childhood, Milne balances the Romantic idea of childhood "innocence" with a more cynical awareness of the child's egotism. His text indulges in the nostalgic fantasy of Arcadia but also undermines it, by calling attention to both the adult's acts of construction and the child's necessary complicity upon which this Arcadia

depends. He challenges the boundary between fantasy and reality by creating multiple fictionalized versions of himself and his son within the layers of his narrative. Milne blends the innovations and experimental techniques of literary modernism with the conventions of fantasy literature and the Victorian nonsense tradition in order to interrogate both traditional and contemporary conceptions of childhood and children's literature. His texts are modernist both in their innovative techniques and in their ironic and self-reflective engagement with the Arcadian tradition.

The second chapter, “‘And the world just went on being round’: Gertrude Stein’s Subversion of Genre expectations,” looks at Stein’s children’s book, *The World is Round*. Stein is one of the most famously difficult writers of the modernist era. Though her influence was widely acknowledged, her experimental writing was largely dismissed until the late 1980s and 1990s. Stein’s first children’s book employs many of the same experimental techniques that adult readers have found frustrating; however, the book enjoyed a measure of success among child readers and contemporary reviewers. Despite this success, Stein could not find a publisher for her subsequent children’s books because they were deemed too dark and experimental for children. Stein refused to accept that these controversial texts were inappropriate for child readers. Rather than “sanitizing” the texts, she (unsuccessfully) sought out other publishers who might accept them. Her persistence in using experimental techniques and addressing dark subjects in her children’s books demonstrates a profound faith both in child readers and in the value of modernist experimentation in children’s literature.

In the interest of providing an in-depth exploration of the stylistic and thematic innovations in Stein’s children’s books, this chapter will focus solely on *The World is*

Round as a representative text. Because it was the only text published in her lifetime, *The World is Round* provides an interesting look at both the experimental techniques and content Stein engaged with in her writing for children and the critical reception such work received from the public. *The World is Round* represents many of the technical innovations for which Stein's writing is known. She relies heavily on rhyme and repetition, or more specifically, *insistence*, alongside nonsensical language and logic. She experiments with readers' expectations of genre, language, and narrative structure. In the process of challenging reader's expectations for the written word, Stein also represents the disillusionment, alienation, and the existential quandaries that plagued modernist authors and artists through her use of stream-of-consciousness and free indirect narration. The text poses sophisticated philosophical questions about identity, subjectivity, and the relationship between language and meaning. Remarkably, it attributes these philosophical quandaries to the mind of a young girl.

In her depiction of Rose, a young female protagonist struggling to come to terms with the modern world, Stein engages with and challenges many of the precepts of the burgeoning field of developmental psychology. She acknowledges many of the fears and anxieties that child psychologists of the time were exploring and documenting in their young patients, but she challenges psychologists' claims about a universal pattern of child development. Instead, she explores the ways in which society's expectations—specifically, expectations about gender—can shape development. Stein's text both invokes and critiques conventions and precepts of language, genre, gender, and psychology to suggest the limitations of essentialist and romantic portrayals of the child and the child mind. She similarly challenges conventions of pastoral literature, quest

narratives, and fairy tales to expose the limitations of restrictive genres of children's literature.

Where Milne exposes the myth of Arcadia by calling attention to the acts of creation on which it depends, Stein disrupts the Arcadian fantasy by foregrounding the dangers and terrors that exist within the natural world. Her protagonist seeks to escape into nature in order to find peace, but the natural world does not provide her with the security or harmony that she seeks. Stein mirrors Milne's subtle, ironic critique, though, in her treatment of gender constructions. Rose sets out on a journey of self-discovery to find her place in a world she does not understand. Her quest is "resolved" through the imposition of a marriage plot, with its traditional "happily ever after." Like Milne, however, Stein only appears to uphold this convention in order to call attention to its artificiality. By creating an alternative, active role for her heroine and then arbitrarily inverting it, Stein critiques the gender expectations imposed by society, and by literature, and illustrates the subtle influence of adult society on children's development. She rejects the comforting illusions of stability inherent in the conventional closure by insisting that Rose's anxieties remain unresolved despite the "happy" ending. Rather than providing the reassuring closure and sense of rootedness that readers expect from children's books, Stein insists upon recognition of the circularity and lack of stability inherent in the modern world.

The third and final chapter, "'Truth is Best,' But What Is Truth?" examines J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan and Wendy*. The Peter Pan stories, in their various forms, are amongst the most frequently analyzed texts in children's literature, but much of the criticism to date focuses primarily on Barrie's personal history and its relationship to the text. This

chapter will offer a new way of contextualizing Barrie and his work by representing him as part of a community of modernists who sought to infuse their works with ambiguity and indeterminacy in an effort to challenge the idea of objective truth. Critics have used pieces of the text to prove highly contradictory claims: that the representations of “redskins” are racist; that these representations are ironic parodies of racism; that the text is sexist; that the text has elements of feminism; that Peter is idealized; that Peter is demonized; that the texts are far too dark and complex for young readers; that the texts are far too sentimental and saccharine for adult readers; and the list goes on. For almost any claim one critic has made about the text, another critic has argued the opposite.

The texts lend themselves to these sorts of contradictory claims because the vision of childhood that Barrie presents within them is a very conflicted one. Children are alternately innocent and cruel; they are not fully immersed in adult culture, but are not entirely free of its influence; eternal childhood is sometimes a dream and sometimes a curse; Neverland is a fantasy or a legitimate lifestyle choice; the island is full of whimsical adventures but also contains the possibility of imminent death; eternal youth is a choice or an inescapable fate; and adults are selfless or self-absorbed, depending on the scene. Rather than attempting to resolve these dichotomies, Barrie’s text embraces this modernist ambiguity and indeterminacy and asks readers to accept that these contradictions are an inherent part of life. Like Milne and Stein, he trusts his readers to handle this complex and unsettling truth.

Peter Pan and Wendy mirrors the Pooh texts and *The World is Round* in its ironic and self-reflexive treatment of its subject matter. Barrie’s narrator asserts that “truth is best,” but the entire narrative complicates and challenges the very idea of truth. Rather

than providing black and white answers, Barrie presents a complex vision of childhood in relation to adult culture and its ideologies. His resistance to the idea of stable truth results in the formal experiments that contribute to the text's indeterminacy. Barrie uses an unreliable and unstable narrator, a nonlinear plot, a blend of disparate generic conventions, parody, a conflicted point of view, and a series of border crossings to illustrate the ambiguities and inconsistencies within contemporary ideologies of childhood, race, gender, and class. By painting Peter as both an ideal child and a selfish brat and by countering suggestions of eternal play, freely chosen, with those of a fated eternal isolation, Barrie captures the alienation and disillusionment of the modernist era and reflects the tensions among shifting constructions of childhood at this time.

Much of the complexity, ambiguity, and narrative "slippages" that confuse Barrie's critics can be understood, in part, by examining the text's engagement with literary modernism – both in its subject matter and in its literary techniques. *Peter and Wendy* offers a sophisticated exploration of the problems of memory and identity, an innovative use of form, a parody of prevailing representations of race, gender, and nationalism, and an ambiguous narrating figure whose self-conscious attention to the construction of the story disrupts the boundary between fantasy and reality. With *Neverland*, Barrie creates a liminal space where children can enact the (arguably adult) fantasy of never growing older, but he ultimately shatters this fantasy both by suggesting that only Peter can exist in such a state and by demonstrating that this type of existence is not desirable for anyone. Through the narrator's shifting relations to the characters and events of the story, Barrie suggests that "truth" is itself a relative concept, rather than a source of stable meaning. In effect, Barrie undermines the sentimentality and escapism

of his surface narrative by producing an experimental and challenging work of literary modernism.

These texts by Milne, Stein, and Barrie were selected because they provide particularly fertile ground for discussion of the intersection between modernism and children's literature, both in terms of technique and ideology. Each author directly engages with the shifting discourses of childhood during the modernist era, using modernist literary techniques as a way of grappling with this complex subject matter. Many other texts were considered for inclusion in this project, and the innovations discussed in the following pages are by no means limited to the texts I have chosen. Several notable children's authors of the late 19th and early 20th century demonstrate similar innovations and engagements; in fact, some of the innovations now associated with modernism can even be traced back to mid-19th century children's authors like Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, and Charles Kingsley. By re-contextualizing some of these texts in terms of the modernist movement, I seek to establish a new field of inquiry that can be applied to authors as diverse as E. Nesbit, L. Frank Baum, Rudyard Kipling, Kenneth Grahame, John Masefield, Eleanor Porter, Wanda Gag, and P.L. Travers.

In selecting these texts, I wish to demonstrate that these experiments are present both in popular children's classics and in more obscure works by figures who are better known for their adult works. Each of the authors I have selected published works for adults alongside the works they published for children. This fact allows for a productive examination of where some of their more "adult" techniques (like irony, parody, and satire) found their way into children's texts. Milne's text embodies much of the characteristics of his satirical writing for *Punch* and other sources. And much like his

famous poem “Vespers,” the sentimentality that has been read into it conflicts with the text’s subtle mockery of such sentiment. Stein makes almost no concessions to the children’s literature genre, save in her ironic use of “once upon a time” and “happily ever after.” Barrie’s text proves particularly interesting for this study due to its somewhat ephemeral nature and multiple iterations. As a text that developed out of imaginative play with children and was then reconfigured into a story told to a child within an adult novel before being re-conceptualized as a play (and later a novel) for children, the story opens itself up to discussions of audience and literary sophistication.

The texts that I have selected all challenge the idea of narrative simplicity and the generic conventions most commonly associated with children’s literature. Each of these texts implies critiques or challenges to the status quo without providing clear solutions or answers. Each makes ostensible concessions to generic conventions, while also provoking an interrogation of these very conventions. In particular, each of these texts problematizes the idea of a happy ending. In her discussion of narrative theory with regards to children’s literature, Maria Nikolajeva explains, “The consonant closure, or the conventional happy ending, is something that many adults immediately associate with children’s literature, and that many scholars put forward as an essential requirement in a good children’s book” (171). While Milne, Stein, and Barrie all gesture towards this conventional happy ending, each author calls attention to problems that persist beyond the close of the narrative. Milne’s toys are left abandoned by the person around whom their universe revolves. Stein’s Rose is married off without actually resolving her existential crisis, and “the world just went on being round” (67). Barrie’s Peter is left on the outside, “looking through the window at the one joy from which he must be for ever

barred” (169). Reflecting both the disillusionment of the modernist era and the irony they have carefully built throughout their narratives, each of these texts provides a superficial happy ending, one that figuratively ends with a question mark rather than a period.

Chapter One:

In Which We Learn that Fantasies Cannot Last and Children Must Outgrow Them:

Winnie-the-Pooh and *The House at Pooh Corner*

A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* have received a great deal of contradictory criticism and praise since their publication in 1926 and 1928, respectively. Frequently denigrated for being too "childish," "simple," and "sentimental," the texts have also been called to task for relying on a humor and wit that is too sophisticated for a child audience. Some critics, like Humphrey Carpenter and Robert Hemmings, have argued that the texts represent an Arcadian escape from the concerns of the modern age, while others, like Frederick Crews, have more boldly suggested that the texts have no merit for serious adult consideration. Carpenter even goes so far as to claim, "the Pooh stories...are almost entirely without layers of secondary meaning" (202). Alternately, Ellen Tremper and others have argued that because the stories rely on a sophisticated wordplay and ironic humor beyond the grasp of young readers, Milne's stories fail to captivate the intended audience and are really only appreciated by more mature teen or adult readers. Even those who believe that children can appreciate the humor, like James Harrison, insist that these children must *learn* to laugh at materials "which were clearly meant to appeal to a rather condescending adult sense of humor" (25). Many agree with Nicholas Tucker's claim that although children may enjoy some aspects of Milne's stories, "they will miss a great deal of the more subtle adult humor" (98). Though these divergent stances rely on opposing views of the texts themselves, they all presume a failure of sorts on Milne's part. Either he wrote above the comprehension of his intended audience or his works were too cloyingly

sweet and simplistic to be taken seriously. Either he failed as a children's author or his stories offer little substance for serious critical analysis.

That the texts have long been disregarded as worthy of critical study is apparent from the dearth of critical scholarship available in comparison with similarly popular works of children's literature. In 1963, Crews produced a sardonic parody of literary theory, *The Pooh Perplex*, wherein the premise of applying high theory to *Winnie-the-Pooh* was made to look ridiculous. In the aftermath of Crews' publication, scholars have seemed hesitant to engage in serious criticism of the series. Alison Lurie notes that Crews "did manage to stifle almost all critical comment on Winnie-the-Pooh for a decade" (11), and Pooh criticism remained sparse in the years that followed. In his discussion of what he terms "poohology," Kenneth Kidd remarks that "*Pooh* makes the ideal delivery system for popular, everyday philosophy and psychology—and also for the disparagement of academic or otherwise 'serious' intellectual work" (Kidd 54). Because scholars felt uncomfortable taking Pooh too seriously, even those who choose to analyze the texts felt the need to justify their interest. Tremper, for example, begins her essay with an acknowledgment that "apologies are due at the start of a paper that presumes to analyze the humor of Alan Alexander Milne" (33). More than twenty years after *The Pooh Perplex*, Jackie Wullschläger observes that "it is still difficult to write a line about Pooh without hearing Crews' satiric laughter over one's shoulder" (qtd in Kidd 56). Crews' 2001 sequel, *Postmodern Pooh* exacerbated the problem of Pooh studies, and there remains a scarcity of serious scholarship related to the classic texts. Though many scholars mention or reference Milne in the context of large scale studies of Golden Age

children's literature, far fewer critics devote sustained attention to criticism of the Pooh texts.

Such critical neglect is problematic because it limits scholarly understanding about the interrelated fields of modernism and children's literature. The Pooh texts provide fertile ground for examining how modernist experiments with language and narrative influenced developments in the genre of children's literature. Historically, culturally, and aesthetically, Milne shares much in common with his modernist contemporaries. He began his literary career as a journalist, writing satiric pieces for the British humor magazine, *Punch*. Many of these pieces, such as "John Penquarto: A Tale of Literary Life in London (Modeled on the Hundred Best Authors)" and "A Poetry Recital" (both reprinted in *The Sunny Side*) demonstrate a familiarity with the experimental techniques of literary modernism. Like many of his contemporaries, Milne was disillusioned by his experiences serving in World War I, calling the war a "nightmare of mental and moral degradation" (Milne, *Too Late* 211). He wrote a satirical play based on his experiences and later published a denunciation of war entitled *Peace with Honor*. Milne did not consider himself primarily a children's author, but rather a playwright, and the majority of his plays provide satiric commentary on the foibles of modern society. Like many well-known modernist authors, he draws inspiration from the nonsense tradition, and specifically from the influence of Lewis Carroll. Wullschläger describes him as "a 1920s humorist—ironic, cynical/sentimental, an escapist who knows he is escaping...a realist" (186).

This portrait of a complex, conflicted, self-aware author is difficult to reconcile with claims that his texts are simple, saccharine, and sentimental. Some scholars, most

notably, Wullschläger and Wynn William Yarbrough, have pointed to modernist techniques and ideas within Milne's texts, but scholarship to date has resisted a sustained critique of how modernist innovations function within the texts or what these techniques might suggest about Milne's view of childhood. A close examination of the texts themselves will show that Milne's satirical comic style, his critical perspective on his own society, and the disillusionment he felt after his experience in the war indelibly marked his children's literature. These traits are not, by any means, unique to Milne's texts. Similar experiments with style and content in children's literature are present, to varying extents, in the work of other early twentieth century authors like Edith Nesbit, Rudyard Kipling, Kenneth Grahame and J.M. Barrie (whose work I will address in a later chapter). Focusing on the work of a single author, however, will allow space for a close critical analysis of both the thematic and linguistic similarities between Golden Age children's literature and literary modernism.

Beyond the qualities of disillusionment and satire, the Pooh stories also reflect Milne's experiments with modernist aesthetics. The deceptive simplicity of Milne's plots counterpoises a narrative that experiments with language, narrative construction, and generic expectations to challenge the boundaries between imagination and reality and between fantasy and realism. Milne both adheres to and disrupts conventions of nineteenth century realism and conventions of fantasy literature. He embraces and rejects the ideal of the Romantic child – balancing the ideal of the child's "innocence" with a more cynical awareness of the child's egotism. He indulges in and critiques the inherent nostalgia in Arcadian fantasies of childhood—undermining the myth of Arcadia by highlighting the acts of construction upon which it depends. He foregrounds the

necessary complicity of the child reader/listener in upholding the fantasy. Milne further indicates his association with the modernist tradition through the fragmentation of his narrative into loosely related segments; the self-consciousness and self-reflexivity of his narrative technique; the complex interplay between his text and the accompanying illustrations; his concern with the interiority of his characters; and the presentation of multiple, sometimes conflicting, viewpoints. He blurs biography and fiction by creating multiple characters (within both the frame narrative and the embedded narrative) that represent fictionalized versions of himself and his real-life son. Ultimately, Milne uses the innovations and experimental techniques of literary modernism alongside the Victorian nonsense tradition to interrogate conceptions of childhood and children's fantasy. The paradoxes of Pooh criticism are understandable because the texts themselves constantly contradict the expectations of both the readers and the characters.

Narrative Instability

This disruption of expectations is introduced in each text, appropriately, in the "Introduction" (or "Contradiction" as it is cleverly misnamed in *House at Pooh Corner*). Milne uses the introduction to both establish and undermine familiar narrative conventions. For example, the inclusion of an introduction suggests a reliance on order and an expectation for a simple and straightforward narrative. The introduction, readers expect, will serve to orient readers to the world of the story—to prepare them for what will follow. And this is, in fact, what the introduction of *Winnie-the-Pooh* does, but not in the way one might expect. Milne begins conventionally enough by drawing a connection between the new text and his previously published poetry with a reference to the swan that Christopher Robin had named "Pooh" in the earlier text. He explains that

“when we said good-bye, we took the name with us, as we didn’t think the swan would want it any more” (Milne, *Winnie* n.p.). His explanation of this connection seems relatively straightforward.

But, lest readers begin to think this narrative will comfortably adhere to their expectations, Milne immediately complicates this explanation with the second half of his account: “Well, when Edward Bear said that he would like an exciting name all to himself, Christopher Robin said at once, without stopping to think, that he was Winnie-the-Pooh. And he was” (Milne, *Winnie* n.p.). With this statement, Milne introduces an element of fantasy by suggesting that his son’s toy bear requested the new name. This confuses the realism of the introduction, a section readers expect to follow certain conventions. The introduction typically sets itself apart from the narrative. It is not a part of the story, but rather a commentary on the story. We expect an introduction to prepare us for what follows—to provide context or explain the world of the story. Typically, the voice in the introduction is more authoritative and less fictional. We associate it with the author rather than the narrator. But Milne injects fantasy into his introduction, making it difficult for readers to differentiate between fact and fiction. Before the story even begins, the lines between imagination and reality begin to blur.

This blurring of boundaries becomes more confusing as the introduction progresses. Milne begins to talk of the London Zoo and explains how “the nicest people go straight to the animal they love the most and stay there” (Milne, *Winnie* n.p.). This, again, seems relatively straightforward. But he then describes Christopher Robin’s visits to the zoo, asserting that on these visits, “he goes to where the Polar Bears are, and he whispers something to the third keeper from the left, and doors are unlocked...and the

cage is opened, and out trots something brown and furry, and with a happy cry of ‘Oh, Bear!’ Christopher Robin rushes into its arms. Now this bear’s name is Winnie” (Milne, *Winnie* n.p.). To the casual reader, this seems like pure fantasy. Surely, no child would be permitted to rush into the arms of a bear at the zoo upon request. This encounter, however, is not entirely fictional. There *was* a tame bear named Winnie at the London Zoo from 1914 to 1934, and the real Christopher Robin Milne actually did have the opportunity to enter her cage and feed her condensed milk on at least one occasion (Crossley n.p.): (see image 1).

The blending of reality and fantasy in the introduction is so seamless that readers can never be entirely sure what is true and what is false. We know that stuffed bears cannot verbalize requests, but we also *think* we know that small children cannot play with bears. Because Milne bases his stories around his real son’s imaginative play with his real toys, the boundaries between the stories and the history become increasingly difficult to distinguish. While critics like Tremper sometimes point out how the child within the frame narrative is “no better than ‘silly old Pooh’ in discriminating between symbolic effect and reality” (36), the introductory sections suggest that the adult narrator is similarly unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality. When Piglet requests that Milne tell readers “about *Me*” (Milne, *Winnie* n.p.), Milne describes the small toy’s jealousy of Pooh, since Pooh is the favorite, but then explains how Piglet sometimes benefits from his small size “because you can’t take Pooh to school without everybody knowing it” (Milne, *Winnie* n.p.). Once again, Milne seems to be blending historical fact with fiction. It is very likely that the young Christopher Milne took his small toy to

school with him, but considerably less likely that the toy could express its jealousy to the author.

This blending reflects a modernist disillusionment with the concepts of certainty and absolute truth. In his essay, “The Culture of Modernism,” Irving Howe observes that “the modern writer can no longer accept the claims of the world” and must rebel “not merely and sometimes not at all against received opinions, but against the received ways of doing the writer’s work” (4). Milne demonstrates this rebellion against convention in his introductory note. Milne’s narrator undermines the concept of certainty and plays with the generally accepted boundaries between fantasy and reality. He exhibits what Howe describes as a distrust of “the limiting assumptions of rationality” (7) and refuses to concede to the rules of logic or convention. Milne does not wish to create a stable fantasy that is distinct from the real world. Rather, he seems to highlight the instabilities within his narrative and foreground the issue of construction, demonstrating the kind of metafictional quality that has become integral to popular conceptions of modernist literature. Milne challenges his readers by refusing to adhere to the rules that they have come to expect from fantasy literature. Specifically, Milne insists on reminding readers that his fantasy is an act of conscious construction. His narrator does not want readers to suspend disbelief; instead, he forces them to confront complex questions about how individuals construct their own perceptions of reality.

Beyond this mixing of fact and fiction, Milne’s narrative persona also introduces an element of uncertainty in his introductory note. He remarks, “we can’t remember whether Winnie is called after Pooh or Pooh after Winnie” and offers “I don’t know which” in response to another question of memory (*Winnie* n.p.). Karín Lesnik-Oberstein

argues that these instances “create a space for the narrator to be without knowledge” and suggests that the continual shift from a position of knowledge and adult authority to an identification with the child’s perspective or the perspectives of the toys exhibits a “self-consciously paraded lack of knowledge or control” (200). For Lesnik-Oberstein, this self-consciousness undermines the fantasy of the narrative: “it becomes a paraded pretence of fantasy: a simultaneous presentation of a fantasy and of its mechanisms, which effectively subverts its status as artless escape from the discourses constructing adulthood” (201). In other words, Lesnik-Oberstein argues that the self-conscious nature of the text highlights the constructed nature of the fantasy. Milne undermines the very Arcadian fantasy he creates by calling attention to the instabilities within the act of creation.

The introduction to *Winnie-the-Pooh* positions readers to expect the blurring of lines and the bending of generic conventions that will follow. The way that Milne seamlessly transitions between reality and fantasy in the introduction suggests that readers can expect similar ambiguity and confusion throughout the body of the text. The narrator both establishes and undermines his role as authoritative storyteller. In this way, Milne’s use of the convention both validates and violates the reader’s expectation. The overtly self-reflexive manner in which he reflects that “perhaps the best thing to do is to stop writing Introductions and get on with the book” (Milne, *Winnie* n.p.) calls attention to the story as construct, while the fact that this realization occurs to the speaker as a result of the pestering “voices” of the toys seems to undermine this recognition of artifice. The narrator seems to believe in and respond to the requests of his fictional

creations while simultaneously acknowledging his own role in the construction of the narrative (and thus, the construction of their identities).

Milne demonstrates the same ambiguous narrative positioning in the “Contradiction” that prefaces *The House at Pooh Corner*. The “Contradiction” begins with an explanation of its naming. Milne writes, “an introduction is to introduce people, but Christopher Robin and his friends...are now going to say Good-bye. So this is the opposite” (*Pooh Corner* n.p.). Thus far, his explanation seems free of any fantastic elements, but the realism is immediately disrupted when he describes how Owl “told us that the opposite of an Introduction...was a Contradiction” (Milne, *Pooh Corner* n.p.). While playfully gesturing towards the idiosyncrasies of the English language, the speaker also compromises his authority over the text by accepting advice from one of his own fictional creations. Carol A. Stanger argues that by naming this section a “Contradiction,” Milne “subverts the form of the introduction by beginning instead with a non-introduction” (44). In this section, Milne both uses and rejects the familiar narrative convention. Paula T. Connolly observes that “Contradiction” is “an apt title, for here he fractures and even ‘contradicts’ the fantasy world of these books” (*Recovering Arcadia* 47). The boundaries between reality and fiction are incredibly unstable in the introductory elements of both texts.

Once again, Milne provides an introductory note that immerses the readers in the world of the story without actually *introducing* it via an authoritative author figure. He asserts his role as storyteller, actually using the word “story” to describe the tales he is about to share, but he also suggests that the stories are “magic adventures” (Milne, *Pooh Corner* n.p.). He implies the fantastic quality of the adventures by asserting that they only

occur when he and Christopher Robin are sleeping, but also mentions how Pooh is the last to fall asleep because he likes to “think Grand Thoughts to himself about Nothing” for awhile first (Milne, *Pooh Corner* n.p). The stuffed bear seems to be capable of thought and consciousness in the world that *precedes* the dream world of the Hundred Acre Wood. Like other fantasy writers before him, Milne asserts that the fantastic world is both a dream and a reality. The adventures he describes take part in the world of dreams, but Pooh’s ability to act, think, talk, and speak is not limited to this dream world. He also asserts that the dream world is not merely his private imaginative world; rather, it is a place where he and his son can share “magic adventures.” He particularly aligns his view with that of J.M. Barrie, who describes his Neverland as a place that children can always access through dreams. Milne similarly explains that his fantastic realm can be accessed by any sympathetic person: “the Forest will always be there...and anybody who is Friendly with Bears can find it” (Milne, *Pooh Corner* n.p). In this way, Milne suggests that the barrier between imagination and reality is not as solid as we might think.

In these introductory sections, Milne establishes his role within the text as both storyteller and character. He is the author, the person with the authority to write (and sign) an introductory note and the person who must “get on with the book” (Milne, *Winnie* n.p.). Lesnik-Oberstein notes that “the narrator directly introduces himself as a story-telling adult in his control both of a history of, and knowledge about, Christopher Robin, Pooh, and Pooh’s names and incarnations” (200). At the same time, he is also a character who is capable of speaking to and interacting with the anthropomorphized toys—a fictionalized representation of the real A.A. Milne. He relates things that “Edward Bear said” and halts his first introduction when Piglet and the others express

their jealousy over the attention that Pooh is getting. His treatment of the subject matter suggests that he is telling these stories from memory rather than constructing them extemporaneously. Milne further complicates this ambiguous relationship between fact and fiction in the introduction to *House at Pooh Corner*, when he directly states that the stories that follow are “all that we shall remember now” of the “magic adventures” he shared with his son (*Pooh Corner* n.p.). Thus, the author disavows his control over the text—he is merely providing a record of adventures that have already occurred in the dream world. But, while the stories themselves may be dreams, both introductions suggest that the sentience of the toys is not.

Self-Reflexive Narrative

Milne continues this layering of fantasy and reality with the device of the frame narrative in *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Through his creative use of the framing device, Milne complicates the structure of his narrative and blurs the boundaries between the two fictional worlds within the text—and, consequently between the text itself and the real life circumstances that contributed to its production. The Pooh stories unsettle readers by challenging their ability to distinguish between truth and construct, undermining the very idea of narrative stability. Breaking the rules of traditional narrative, he creates a self-conscious text in which meaning is constantly deferred and boundaries are challenged. Milne’s text is distinctly modern in its adaptation of the framing device to call attention to the subjective nature of truth and the tenuous boundary between what is real and what is imagined. The frame narrative itself is not a new technique, but Milne’s frame constantly intrudes upon the embedded narrative to remind readers that the story is not merely a fantasy or dream (as with Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*), but a

consciously constructed tale. Particularly, Milne's technique is remarkable in that the child listener of the frame narrative (Christopher Robin) is able to collaborate in the construction of the story through his intrusive questions and additions. Many children's authors, like Carroll and Barrie, have indicated that this type of collaboration with child friends shaped the construction of their stories; however, Milne makes this process a visible part of the story itself. While ostensibly constructing an innocent and simplistic tale for children, Milne has actually created a very complicated and experimental narrative.

Winnie-the-Pooh is split into several chapters, each focused on a self-contained tale that contributes to the larger story of Pooh's adventures. In the first of these tales, Milne begins by establishing the frame narrative of a father telling stories to his son, Christopher Robin. While the interactions between the fictionalized version of Christopher Robin and his father are largely restricted to the first and last chapters of the book, their conversations periodically intrude upon the embedded narrative of Pooh's adventures, causing considerable frustration for readers who attempt to establish clear boundaries between reality, frame narrative, and fantasy tale. The same names seem to refer to: the author and his real life son, Christopher Robin Milne (who went by Christopher Milne and shall hereafter be referred to as such); the author character (A.A.M.) who writes the introductory notes about his son (hereafter referred to as C.R.M.) and his toys; the narrator character and his son Christopher Robin; and the Christopher Robin who exists within the embedded narrative of the Hundred Acre Wood (hereafter referred to as *Christopher Robin*).

Though it would simplify things to assume the real Milne is speaking as himself in the introductory note (and thus Milne = A.A.M), a separation always exists between a real person and that person's textual representation of him or herself. Representation inevitably requires an act of construction. That this introductory note is not meant to be taken as a true representation of the author and his son is clear both from the playful interweaving of fact and fantasy and from the historical record. Christopher Milne eventually published several memoirs with the acknowledged intention of separating the facts of his childhood from the fictional world of his father's poetry and prose. In them, he suggests that the relationship between himself and his father in reality was very different from the textualized version: "it was precisely because [my father] was *not* able to play with his small son that his longings sought and found satisfaction in another direction. He wrote about him instead" (36). Because A.A.M.'s introduction recasts this relationship in a different light, the author figure becomes a character in his own right. Milne's choice to layer these different versions of himself and his son calls attention to the creative power inherent in any act of representation and the difficulty in separating fact from fiction.

Though I believe Milne intended to call attention to the complex interplay of fantasy and reality by naming his characters after his son and his toys, the experiment seems to have worked a little better than Milne anticipated. Through his creation of a fictionalized version of his son, Milne inadvertently created confusion wherein readers have conflated the Christopher Robin of the frame narrative with the real Christopher Milne – a fact that plagued Christopher Milne throughout much of his life. In his memoirs, Christopher Milne expresses his desire "to escape from Christopher Robin"

(166) and declares that “he and his real-life namesake were not always on the best of terms” (163). A.A. Milne always insisted that his real son had little in common with the fictionalized version. In his essay entitled “The End of a Chapter,” Milne declares: “All I have got from Christopher Robin is a name which he never uses, an introduction to his friends...and a gleam which I have tried to follow” (Milne, “End” 122). Despite his insistence on this separation, however, readers continued to equate the two, much to Christopher Milne’s chagrin. The extent to which this became a problem for him is clear in his reflection that “it seemed to me, almost, that my father...had filched from me my good name and had left me with nothing but the empty fame of being his son” (165). Reflecting on the complications that resulted from his decision to name the character after his son, Milne explains that “the distinction, if clear to me, is not so clear to others” and cites the blurring of the boundaries between “the imaginary and legal Christopher Robin” as one of the reasons he ceased to write about the character (Milne, “End” 122).

This conflation of the two Christophers, while undesirable, demonstrates the extent to which Milne’s blurring of narrative boundaries leaves readers unable to distinguish between the real and the imaginary. While readers generally accept that the embedded narrative is fictional, they are not as confident in separating the frame narrative from the author’s history. Not many adult readers believe that the real life Winnie-the-Pooh toy is identical to the walking, talking version Milne has created, but Christopher Milne was forced to endure “the public’s confusion of him with...the idealized child of his father’s literary creation” (Connolly, “Marketing” 190). It is unclear whether A.A. Milne had considered the potential real-world ramifications of this blurring of identities. His son seems to believe that the choice was primarily an aesthetic one, since “It

[Christopher Robin] was a wonderful name for writing poetry round” (24). However, in choosing not only to use the name, but to use it on each different layer of his Pooh stories, A.A. Milne seems to be intentionally confusing his readers, perhaps as a way of calling attention to the acts of construction and interpretation that adults almost inevitably apply to real children. By erasing the borders between the different versions of Christopher, A.A. Milne suggests the difficulty of pinning down a child’s identity: the adult author can never fully know his own child. Christopher Milne’s unwanted fame appears as a testament to his father’s success in challenging the traditional narrative boundaries between reality and fiction with respect to identity formation. A.A. Milne appears to have done his job a little too well.

Because versions of the author and his son pervade every layer of the text, *Winnie the Pooh* calls attention to the process of its own construction and violates the rules of traditional narrative through the continual intrusions of the frame narrative into the embedded narrative. The first story begins with the expected convention of children’s fiction—“Once upon a time” (Milne, *Winnie* 2). But, lest readers begin to think this narrative will be in any way conventional, this traditional opening is almost immediately followed by an interrupting question from Christopher Robin. This interruption marks the first of many, which constantly redirect attention back to the frame narrative. These disruptions remind readers that the adventures of Pooh and his friends are the imaginative creations of the author character, designed to entertain a specific audience of one child (and one stuffed bear). Attempting to maintain the traditional separation between story and reality causes readers to naively interpret the frame story as a sort of autobiographical reality, thus leading to the conflation of character and namesake that caused such trouble

for Christopher Milne. However, regardless of whether they are misguided into this assumption of the frame narrative as true, readers cannot fully suspend disbelief and immerse themselves in the world of the embedded narrative because the frame narrative constantly intrudes to remind them that the adventures are merely stories.

Tremper claims that these intrusions do not extend beyond the first chapter and that, afterwards, “the narrator conceals himself and Christopher Robin is only a character in the story” (36). Connolly similarly asserts that “for the most part, the self-conscious narrator disappears, allowing the readers to forget that these are only stories being told to another child, and the fantasy world gains imaginative strength because is it [sic] not diluted by constant references to the normative world” (*Recovering Arcadia* 43). In fact, Connolly further claims that “except for the intrusion of the Introduction/Contradiction, this spell is never broken” (47) and readers can completely submerge themselves in the fantasy world. These assertions bear some truth. The Introduction/Contradiction and the first chapter of *Winnie-the-Pooh* are the most obvious and blatant examples of narrative intrusion. However, they are by far not the only instances.

While the intrusions do become less frequent after the initial story, they continue throughout *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and the Christopher Robin of the frame narrative does make a few more appearances—at the end of the chapter about Eeyore’s birthday and again at the close of the final chapter. Beyond these direct intrusions of the frame narrative, Milne also makes several metafictional comments that call attention to the text itself. In one notable example, he describes one of Owl’s interminable stories in an absurdly long compound sentence, noting that “the story went on and on, rather like this sentence” (Milne, *Winnie* 131-32). “As...I am very tired after that last sentence,” he later adds, “I

think I shall stop there” (Milne, *Winnie* 132). Milne does not allow readers to completely suspend their disbelief; instead, he intentionally disturbs the illusion and calls attention to the act of construction. The text demonstrates modernist technique in its self-reflexive narrative style.

The self-reflexive or self-conscious narrative has become one of the hallmarks of literary modernism. Roger Shattuck explains this turning inward as the artistic response to a changing world. Shattuck describes the “complex unity” of modern art as an attempt “to become totally *self-remembering*, self-reflexive, without conventions...of logical consistency” (332). He further theorizes this principle by explaining, “Self-reflexiveness aims a work of art at itself, at its own development, as both subject and form” (341). Milne exhibits this self-reflexive technique in his disregard for conventional boundaries between fantasy and reality. By transitioning seamlessly between fact and fiction and blending biographical detail with fictional construct, Milne creates a work that consciously defies “conventions...of logical consistency.” His text constantly turns inward and calls attention to its own construction. The episodic plots, though endearing and amusing, are not really the focus of Milne’s stories. *Winnie-the-Pooh* is really a story about storytelling.

By foregrounding the issue of construction, Milne calls attention to the artificiality of adult narratives about childhood. Children’s literature as a genre is constantly plagued by definitional problems. In *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*, Jacqueline Rose argues that children’s literature is an impossibility, because the adult always comes first. She insists that any writing for children is inevitably shaped by adult interests and adult conceptions of the child. For

this reason, Rose argues that children's literature is by nature a regressive genre – a site for adults to create and uphold myths of childhood innocence and the Romantic ideal of the child. In her view, children's literature insists on a stability and certainty that are impossible in the real world. She concludes that children's literature rejected literary modernism because children's literature refused to examine or complicate ideas of language or subjectivity. Half a century before Rose's argument, Milne's narrative brings attention to the same problems of construction and influence in children's stories. Rather than unconsciously reflecting adult conceptions of the child, the Pooh stories foreground the issue of construction and remind readers that the stories are consciously shaped by an adult author. Milne does not pretend that *Christopher Robin* is a true reflection of Christopher Milne (or even of the Christopher Robin in the frame narrative). Rather, he emphasizes that his characters are the creations of the author.

Because Christopher Robin is both the child for whom the stories are being told and a character within the tales, his intrusive questions and comments disrupt the narrative and complicate the structure, calling attention to the act of construction. When *Christopher Robin* enters into the embedded narrative, Christopher Robin initially expresses surprise and wonder: “‘*Was that me?*’ said Christopher Robin in an awed voice, hardly daring to believe it” (Milne, *Winnie* 7). In the remainder of this first tale, the narrator refers to *Christopher Robin* as “you,” providing readers with a constant reminder of the intended audience for the embedded narrative and reassuring the child of his own role within the fictive world. This convention once again highlights the constructed nature of the stories and prevents readers from fully entering into Pooh's world. Unlike the use of the second person in narratives that make the reader a part of

the story, Milne uses the second person pronouns to position the reader as an interloper who is eavesdropping on an imaginative game between the father and son. The reader, it seems, does not belong in the Hundred Acre Wood; only Christopher Robin and his toys can become a part of the story. The unusual pronoun usage reinforces the idea that the stories are a construct, carefully crafted by the narrator father for the sole enjoyment of his son. The act of construction becomes the focus in these moments of intrusion.

In subsequent tales, however, *Christopher Robin* is referred to in the third person, allowing readers to momentarily forget the frame narrative, until Christopher Robin interrupts with a question or comment about his own role in an adventure. Because of the ambiguity of the child's role in both the frame narrative and the embedded narrative, Milne complicates the reader's understanding what is "real" and what is imaginary within the context of each narrative. Sometimes *Christopher Robin* is a fictional construct, referred to in the same objective narrative style as the other characters. At other times, he becomes a more direct representation of the Christopher Robin in the frame narrative. The links between the two are enforced through the use of "you" and through Christopher Robin's assertions of his memory of the fictional events. The child introduced in Milne's "Introduction" and the specter of the real life Christopher Milne further complicate this role-shifting. Milne's narrative vacillates between asserting and deconstructing the demarcations between these different Christopher Robins, ultimately leading readers to focus more of the acts of construction and appropriation than the fantasy itself.

Even the character of Christopher Robin seems to have difficulty distinguishing between his "real" life and his fantasy adventures. Once the narrator has assured Christopher Robin of his own presence within the stories, the child quickly adopts a

position of one who has already experienced these adventures. Marah Gubar explores this notion of adult influence over memory in her influential text, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature*. She points to a similar moment in E. Nesbit's *Harding's Luck*, in which a character begins to internalize his nurse's stories as his own memories. Gubar reads this moment as indicating Nesbit's awareness of "the extent to which adults—and their texts—teach children how to be children" (*Artful Dodgers* 147). Milne's text demonstrates a similar awareness and uneasiness with the issue of adult influence. Perhaps for this reason, his text highlights the acts of construction and manipulation inherent in the act of storytelling.

Milne's narrator encourages his son's assumption of the stories as real by responding to the boy's questions with statements like "Don't you remember?" (Milne, *Winnie* 17). Rather than compromising his position of authority, the child projects his own ignorance onto his stuffed bear. Christopher Robin explains, "I do remember...only Pooh doesn't very well, so that's why he likes having it told to him again. Because then it's a real story and not just a remembering" (Milne, *Winnie* 17-18). Christopher Robin draws a distinction between story and memory, suggesting that while he "remember[s]" the events his father describes, they cannot become stories until someone tells them to him. His assertion resonates particularly with the work of Hannah Lynch, Victorian author of *Autobiography of a Child*, who argues that children cannot construct their own memories into a clear narrative or "story" until age seven (Martens 8). Christopher Robin's claim becomes more complicated, however, in light of the fact that he is claiming to "remember" fictional events.

Christopher Robin's false claims to memory are particularly interesting in light of the modernist preoccupation with childhood memories. In *The Promise of Memory: Childhood Recollection and Its Objects in Literary Modernism*, Lorna Martens explores developments in memory theory at the turn of the century and examines the implications of the growing interest in childhood memory on literary modernism. Building from Freud's assertion that "our conscious childhood memories are unreliable, in fact, no better than fiction" (Martens 4), Martens analyzes the role of memory in literature. She argues that "the accuracy of a personal memory often counts for far less than its emotional importance" (12) and insists that authors often "embellish genuine memories or supplement them with invented ones" to make their childhood memories more literary. She further insists that although "literary memories can be assumed to involve an admixture of fiction," these memories "may paradoxically seem truer, as well as falser, than a plain account" (15). Martens' theory, which she uses to analyze modernist memoir, can help explain Christopher Robin's insistence that he "remembers" events which never occurred—for him, his father's stories present a "truer" account of his childhood than the actual fragmentary memories he may possess at this age. By demonstrating the ease with which the narrator/father is able to implant false memories in his son, Milne suggests that childhood is not something pure, authentic, and untouched, but rather something constructed and manipulated by adult influence and control.

Having established his knowledgeable position, Christopher Robin limits his questions and interruptions in subsequent tales and actively participates in the construction of the tales themselves by providing additional information that his father has omitted. When Christopher Robin expresses his disappointment that "he" did not

give Eeyore a birthday present, his father assures him that he did and prompts him to fill in the gap by stating “Of course you did... You gave him—don’t you remember—a little—a little—” (Milne 80). The child immediately accepts this statement and extrapolates from it, insisting, “I gave him a box of paints to paint things with” (80). He creates a memory for himself by supplementing his father’s narrative. When his father attempts to provide further information about Eeyore’s birthday party, the child re-affirms “Yes, *I* remember” (80). Through these statements, Christopher Robin asserts that the tales are a true relation of adventures he has actually experienced rather than a fictional construct of his father’s creation. His father’s promptings encourage him to enter into the fantasy and participate in its construction, but they also blur the lines between truth and fantasy, memory and story.

In her exploration of developments in child studies in the latter half of the 19th century, Sally Shuttleworth points to the problem of the confused relation between lying and storytelling. She notes, “it is far from clear that a child has such powers of discrimination between an inner imaginative life and external reality” (63). Shuttleworth cites the work of renowned child psychologist James Sully, who argues that young children are fascinated with story because “children, like savages, inhabit a mythological realm” (Shuttleworth 83). Sully insists that for young children, “words are not dead thought-symbols, but truly alive” and thus powerful (qtd in Shuttleworth 83). While many of Sully’s Edwardian colleagues believed that fantasy stories were good for young children, they also believed in the risk of indulging too much in imaginative fancies. “Imaginative play,” Shuttleworth notes, “necessarily brings self-deception” (83). Milne

seems to be acknowledging this risk of self-deception through Christopher Robin's assertions that he "remembers" the fictional events his father describes.

Despite the psychological insights that the text offers into the mind of the young child, scholars like Carpenter, Hemmings, and Stephen Canham, among others, often regard the Pooh texts as simplistic and sentimental, or to use Canham's term, "reassuring." Carpenter asserts that the stories "are almost entirely without layers of secondary meaning. They are exercises in the humorist's art, and almost nothing else" (202). According to Carpenter, any attempt at analyzing these stories is "futile" because of this lack of secondary meaning (202). Hemmings argues that the texts are "consumed with nostalgia" and insists that this nostalgia "works to cover over aspects of childhood distasteful to adult sensibilities, with only partial success" (54). In his theory of nostalgia in golden age children's literature, Hemmings declares that nostalgia serves as "the idealizing cloth with which the adult masks, covers over, and tidies up childhood, but it is strained and frayed in places which expose the anxieties and distresses that mobilize the nostalgia" (59). Arguably, Canham takes this idea of simplicity and nostalgia farthest by declaring that "the world of Winnie-the-Pooh is an 'unself-conscious' world, one which is complete in and of itself" (1). Each of these scholars overlooks the ways in which Milne calls attention to the artificiality of this nostalgia through his use of the frame narrative.

By insisting on the simplicity of the narrative and declaring it to be "unself-conscious," these readings completely disregard the intrusions of the meta-narrative, which repeatedly call attention to the text as construct. Rather than indulging in a nostalgic, Arcadian fantasy that erases the problems and anxieties of childhood, Milne is

actually calling attention to the artificiality of the narrative and the artificiality of childhood memories. Lest readers forget that this Arcadian world is fictional, the narrator and Christopher Robin continually break into the narrative to remind them. These direct intrusions are mostly absent from the second book, but Milne replaces them with a different kind of disruptive force—the intrusions of the “real” world and the recognition that *Christopher Robin* will soon have to leave the Forest behind. While scholars like Hemmings believe that the text “inadvertently” reveals the very anxieties it attempts to conceal through nostalgic revisioning, I would argue that Milne intentionally calls attention to these anxieties through the continual intrusions of the external world. The meta-fictive nature of both the frame narrative and the authorial commentary that precedes the text proper, serve to undermine the myth of Arcadia by directly establishing it to be a fictional construct. Furthermore, these moments of intrusion undermine the idea of the child as an entirely natural being, uninfluenced by adults or the adult world, as Gubar argues about other Golden Age texts in *Artful Dodgers*. Foregrounding the artificiality of his stories, Milne also demonstrates the artificiality of the “stories” adults have constructed about childhood.

In *The House at Pooh Corner*, Milne further presses this point that the Arcadian fantasy and the idealized child upon which it centers are merely a fantasy. The frame narrative is absent in *Pooh Corner*, but Milne replaces it with increasingly direct intrusions of the “real” world into the Forest. The Pooh stories exist within the context of secondary world fantasies—or fantasies that posit the existence of an alternate fantasy world (in this case, the Hundred Acre Wood) that exists alongside the “real” world or normative world. Generally, these types of fantasies suggest a clear demarcation between

the two worlds—as with the *Chronicles of Narnia* or *The Wizard of Oz* series. Lousia Smith identifies a key convention of this genre by explaining that, within the secondary world, “links with normality are relatively insignificant or irrelevant, or make their point peripherally” (447). Such stories generally begin with the first world, move into the second world as the characters take part in adventures, and then return safely to the first world again at the narrative’s end. Milne’s stories initially establish this structure in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, positioning themselves firmly within the genre of secondary world fantasy. Milne continually violates the conventions of the genre, however, by allowing the frame narrative to intrude into the second world and disrupt the illusion.

In *The House at Pooh Corner*, the frame narrative is absent, and all of the action takes place within the Hundred Acre Wood. This would seem to allow a complete immersion into the fantasy world; however, the presence of the first world still haunts the second. Through continual references to *Christopher Robin*’s education and his increasing absences from the second world, characters are constantly reminded that the fantasy world is not real and that *Christopher Robin* will soon outgrow it. Reflecting on the primary difference between the two texts, Connolly observes that in *Pooh Corner* “the normative world has taken a new shape: the Outland. Lying beyond the Forest, this is a place of lessons and responsibilities, clearly the world into which Christopher Robin must journey as he begins school” (*Recovering Arcadia* 45). She further notes, “The tensions between the Forest and the Outland seem real” (45). *Christopher Robin*’s movement towards adulthood creates conflict within the Forest world. In this way, Milne disrupts the idyllic fantasy of Arcadian escape by foregrounding the inevitable loss of childhood. Specifically, he emphasizes the distance between the “real” child, who must

grow up and leave the Forest, and the toy characters that will be left behind and abandoned.

Rather than offering an escapist paradise, Milne reminds older readers that such escape is impossible to sustain; his stories gesture towards the irremediable loss of innocence and the disillusionment of the modern age. By drawing attention to the artificial and temporary quality of his fantasy world, Milne suggests that Arcadia is always a fantasy. More to the point, it is a fantasy that adults carefully construct about childhood. No matter how much effort or energy an author expends in creating such a fantasy, it remains an artistic creation. No amount of wishing can make it real or prevent the children for whom such tales are created from outgrowing them. *Christopher Robin* leaves the Forest, and the stories end. The toys do not continue their adventures in his absence, because once the child is no longer fixed within the fantasy world, the fantasy world ceases to exist.

Relationship between Language and Meaning

Beyond the self-reflexive quality of his framing device, Milne's experimentation extends to an interrogation of how language constructs meaning and how fiction can shape reality. Through his assertions of knowledge, Christopher Robin is able to construct his own history by verifying the veracity of his father's tales. Christopher Robin creates a personal meaning for the stories by inserting himself into the process of their creation and declaring his authority over the text. The stories are true for Christopher Robin simply because he imagines them to be. He gives the stories meaning by interjecting himself into the text and extending the narrative beyond what his father provides. In this way, the stories become a part of his history.

In much the same way, Pooh and his friends (including *Christopher Robin*) construct their own meanings for objects and signs within the stories, much like Humpty Dumpty of Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, who famously declares "When I use a word... it means just what I choose it to mean" (213). As with Carroll's Alice texts, which Juliet Dusinberre and others regard as a key inspiration for the later modernist movement, meaning within the Pooh tales is never stable but rather subjective and constructed through language. The North Pole is a stick because *Christopher Robin* has declared it to be. Eeyore's tail is Owl's bell-rope until Pooh declares it to be otherwise. What the characters call something determines what it is. Reflecting on this phenomenon, Connolly addresses the way that "Pooh creates his own imaginative world" in adventures like those of the imaginary Heffalumps and Woozles ("Marketing" 196). Connolly suggests that these adventures point to "a recognition of the symbiotic relationship between his imagination and the reality he creates for himself" ("Marketing" 196). By asserting their authority on a subject, the characters are able to construct their own reality through language. While such power may seem liberating for child readers, it actually points to a disturbing instability of language that further complicates our ability to ever know anything for certain. In other words, as with the Alice texts that preceded it, this linguistic instability in the Pooh texts is both playful and unsettling.

This idea of the subjective power of language in creating meaning first appears at the very beginning of the narrative. When the narrator first introduces Winnie-the-Pooh, he recounts his confusion upon first hearing the name. The narrator tells Christopher Robin that "you can't call him Winnie" since he is a boy bear, but Christopher Robin merely asserts his own power over language, insisting: "I don't...He's Winnie-ther-

Pooh. Don't you know what 'ther' means?" (Milne, *Winnie* 1). Rather than challenging his son's nonsensical explanation, the narrator concedes the point, declaring "Ah, yes, now I do" (Milne, *Winnie* 1). Readers are left to speculate upon the meaning of "ther," because the narrator asserts that the boy's statement "is all the explanation you are going to get" (Milne, *Winnie* 1). This marks the readers' first exposure to the subjective relationship between language and meaning within the text, but it is certainly not the last. Delighting in linguistic play, nonsense, and puns, Milne's narrative playfully highlights some of the idiosyncrasies of the English language while calling into question the very concept of stable meaning. Characters gain authority through the stubbornness of their assertions and repeatedly demonstrate their faith in the power of language to construct reality. Typically, this faith leads the characters to embarrassments or unintended consequences, suggesting that linguistic power is somewhat threatening and beyond their control.

Pooh's first adventure highlights this trust in the power of linguistic authority. Attempting to retrieve some honey from a beehive, Pooh concocts an elaborate plan in which he will disguise himself with mud and a blue balloon to trick the bees into thinking he is merely "a small black cloud" (Milne, *Winnie* 11). Pooh soon discovers that his deception is not fooling the bees, so he asks *Christopher Robin* to walk underneath him with an umbrella "and say 'Tut-tut, it looks like rain'" (Milne, *Winnie* 13). Pooh has complete faith that this linguistic assertion "would help the deception which we are practicing on these bees" (Milne, *Winnie* 13). He further declares, "I shall do what I can by singing a little Cloud Song, such as a cloud might sing" (Milne, *Winnie* 14). Since his attempt at visual deception has failed, he believes that he can manipulate the bees'

reaction with the power of language. Believing in the power of his words to shape the bees' perception, he asserts that "every little cloud/ *Always* sings aloud" (Milne, *Winnie* 14). By "singing a little Cloud Song" and having *Christopher Robin* verbally validate his role as a rain cloud, Pooh thinks he will fool the bees into believing his deception.

This attempt to manipulate reality through the power of language fails utterly, but Pooh never doubts that his plan was a good one—he merely determines that "*These are the wrong sort of bees*" (Milne, *Winnie* 15). Despite the failure of this first attempt, Pooh later utilizes the same method to distract Kanga so that Piglet and Rabbit can enact their plan to kidnap Roo. Pooh's recitation of "Lines Written by a Bear of Very little Brain" also fails in its deceptive purpose. Readers may delight in this nonsense verse, which begins each stanza with a day of the week, but Kanga interrupts his recitation, "not waiting to hear what happened on Friday" (Milne, *Winnie* 90). Pooh must resort to less sophisticated means of deception by asking Kanga to turn her head to look at a tree behind her.

Though both attempts at using poetry for deception fail, Pooh's continued faith in the power of language is demonstrated repeatedly throughout the two texts. When he is stuck in Rabbit's front door, he asks *Christopher Robin* to "read a Sustaining Book, such as would help and comfort a Wedged Bear in Great Tightness" (Milne, *Winnie* 27). When his mistakes cause him to feel that he is "a Bear of No Brain at All," he only needs *Christopher Robin* to tell him that he is "the Best Bear in All the World" for him to believe it. Pooh believes that language has power over reality, but he is not the only character who believes this. When Pooh explains to Piglet that "Jagulars" always call for help "and then when you look up, they drop down on you," Piglet tries to deter an attack

through the power of words: “I’m looking *down*, cried Piglet loudly, so the Jaguar shouldn’t do the wrong thing by accident” (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 67). Even the narrator bows to the power of linguistic authority. When *Christopher Robin* and Kanga are teasing Piglet and insist that he cannot be Piglet because he looks different after his bath, the narrator accepts their authority over Piglet’s identity. After *Christopher Robin* declares that he will name this new creature “Henry Pootel,” the narrator also begins to refer to Piglet as Henry Pootel. Piglet’s identity remains unstable until the end of the episode. Language has an almost unquestioned authority within the text. Characters can use language to reshape the world of the Hundred Acre Wood and even to alter one another’s identities.

Illegitimate Authority

Because language has such power and authority within the Hundred Acre Wood, those who claim linguistic authority automatically gain the respect of their fellows. Diana Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb note that these texts “suggest an awareness of the social power of language...that reflects Modernist concerns” (103). In effect, the Forest operates according to a class system wherein the intelligentsia are able to exercise authority over the other animals—whether or not their intellectual reputation has any foundation. Rabbit and Owl both maintain a level of respect within the Forest because of their reputation for literacy. Eeyore similarly asserts his own superiority over the other animals based on his knowledge of the letter A: ““People come and go in this Forest, and they say, 'It’s only Eeyore, so it doesn’t count.’...But do they know anything about A? They don’t” (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 88). Those who can boast linguistic abilities are in a higher social position than their less knowledgeable peers. In these moments, Milne

seems to be offering a subtle parody of the modernist intelligentsia, or those who claim superiority via their advanced education and knowledge. The subtle mockery of such intellectual elitism seems to position Milne's text both within and outside of modernist literature. While he employs many techniques of literary modernism, Milne also highlights the egotism and pretense inherent within claims to authority through superior intellect.

Despite the clear deference to the power of language and knowledge within the text, Milne provides indications that many of those who claim authority over language are merely posturing. The animals all consider Owl to be the wisest and most knowledgeable amongst them. Pooh explicitly states that "if anyone knows anything about anything...it's Owl who knows something about something" (Milne, *Winnie* 43), and the other characters demonstrate a similar faith in Owl's abilities. Even Rabbit, who generally considers himself superior to the others, acknowledges a grudging respect for Owl "because you can't help respecting anybody who can spell TUESDAY, even if he doesn't spell it right" (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 76). Owl occupies a position of authority on the basis of his perceived intellectual capabilities.

But although Owl is quite capable of using elevated language to intimidate his friends, his intellectual capabilities are not as grand as the others suspect. He cannot spell "Happy Birthday" when Pooh asks him to write it on Eeyore's present, but he does not acknowledge this. Instead, he "anxiously" asks whether Pooh can read (Milne, *Winnie* 74) and only agrees to write it when he is certain Pooh will not know the difference. When Rabbit finds a note on *Christopher Robin's* door and brings it to Owl to discuss, Milne reveals that the resident scholar of the Hundred Acre Wood is actually illiterate.

Owl has to trick Rabbit into reading the note for him before he can comment on it. A few moments later, however, Owl has comfortably reassumed his sense of superiority and reflects that “To one of his education the reading of it was easy” (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 81). Through his use of free indirect discourse, Milne exposes Owl’s pretensions to knowledge by allowing readers to access Owl’s thoughts and to discover the limitations of his literacy. Milne then demonstrates how easily Owl is able to reassume those pretensions and disavow his own ignorance. His power and position within the Hundred Acre Wood grow out of his ability to manipulate the perceptions of others rather than any actual superiority.

Rabbit and *Christopher Robin* exhibit similar pretensions of knowledge. Organizing an expedition to the North Pole, *Christopher Robin* asserts his authority over the animals and his position of superior knowledge. When Pooh mispronounces the word expedition, *Christopher Robin* calls him a “silly old bear”—a somewhat derisive term of endearment that he often uses when Pooh demonstrates a lack of knowledge. When Pooh asks what the North Pole is, *Christopher Robin* refuses to acknowledge his own ignorance and instead provides a vague, dismissive response. *Christopher Robin’s* insistence upon maintaining his own superiority at the expense of his friend reflects Milne’s view of the child as possessing “an egotism entirely ruthless” (Milne, *Christopher Robin Verses* vi). Roger Sale explains this position of superiority as the child’s response to his own powerlessness in the world outside of the Forest. *Christopher Robin* is unwilling to acknowledge his own limitations because it would compromise his authority within the Forest. Later, *Christopher Robin* pulls Rabbit aside to ask him what the North Pole looks like, and both characters attempt to maintain their sense of

superiority while simultaneously attempting to glean the information from the other. Both claim to have known once, but “sort of forgotten” (Milne, *Winnie* 110), and their exchange suggests that the status they hold on the basis of their superior knowledge is somewhat undeserved.

Critics like Hemmings and Carpenter point to *Christopher Robin*'s unquestioned authority as a mark of Milne's nostalgic revisioning, insisting that “the only real adult in Pooh's world is Christopher Robin” (Carpenter 203) and comparing his authority over the animals to “an adult's authority over a child” (Hemmings 72). Hemmings argues that this unquestioned authority “reveals a reconstruction of childhood that serves the interests of adults, not children” (72). In other words, *Christopher Robin* serves as a stand-in for adult authority, which is never challenged and is, in Hemmings' view, “always harmonious and benevolent” (72). Carpenter takes this farther to suggest that *Christopher Robin*'s authority within the world of the Hundred Acre Wood is actually godlike (204) because of the way the character often arrives to save the day. Lurie similarly claims that *Christopher Robin* is “both creator and judge—the two divine functions shared by mortal parents” (14). Scholars often perceive this supreme, parental authority as a mark of the adult's desire to maintain authority over the imaginative world. They argue that by creating a character to whom all the others turn for help and advice, Milne is actually reaffirming the hierarchical relationship between children and adults.

In reality, however, while none of the characters ever question *Christopher Robin*'s authority, Milne actually reveals this authority to be without foundation. Even the characters with pretensions to knowledge and authority of their own defer to “Christopher Robin,” but the readers know that *Christopher Robin* is not always as well-

informed as he pretends to be. Yarbrough argues that by demonstrating how authority is sometimes ill-founded, Milne “capture[s] a distrust that Modernist artists demonstrate in their work” (108). Stanger similarly points out that “to the extent that [various characters] seek control, they are made to appear ridiculous” (41). Milne teaches his audience to question authority by suggesting that one can acquire a reputation for knowledge without actually possessing it. *Christopher Robin* maintains a position of complete and unquestioned authority within the Forest with no basis for this power. Thus, Milne actually undermines established hierarchies by suggesting that one should never blindly accept another’s claim to authority. In episodes like the one outlined above, readers see that the person to whom all the other’s turn for guidance and wisdom is sometimes just as lost and confused as the rest of them.

Linguistic Play

The conflict between actual knowledge and perceived knowledge is central to the humor and linguistic play within both of Milne’s children’s novels. Linguistic idiosyncracies, misinterpretation, and puns abound in both texts as a result of various characters’ pretensions to knowledge. As Tucker notes, much of the pleasure of Milne’s stories develops out of his ability to “show children...how easy it sometimes is for an immature mind to misconstrue things” (98). In one notable example, Piglet interprets the broken “Trespassers W” sign outside of his home as proof of his family’s ownership. Because the sign is fragmented and can no longer clearly communicate its intended message, Piglet is able to interpret it as he chooses. Unfamiliar with the convention of signs posted to ward off trespassers, Piglet insists that his grandfather’s name was Trespassers W, which “was short for Trespassers Will, which was short for Trespassers

William” (Milne, *Winnie* 30). Yarbrough commends Milne’s writing in this scene, declaring that “Milne’s play with circular logic...mimics the thoughts of a child, especially when they are lying” (118). When *Christopher Robin* challenges Piglet’s assertion, Piglet stubbornly insists on the veracity of his statement by providing additional details and justifications. He explains that “his grandfather had two names in case he lost one—Trespassers after an uncle, and William after Trespassers” (Milne, *Winnie* 30). Piglet’s confidence in his own invented history is enough to quash all objections, despite the illogical nature of his explanation and his obvious misreading of the broken sign.

Addressing this narrative episode, Tremper observes, “Milne delights in exploding the idiomatic language of adults...by supplying very literal translations that answer a child’s desire for pictorial representation. He wittily points to the absurdities in language that we ignore but which become very amusing when we pay them any attention” (40). Because young Piglet does not understand the meaning of the broken sign, he attempts to formulate his own, in accordance with Tremper’s claim that “children look for concrete meanings” (40). The simplest interpretation for one who does not know what the term “trespassers” means is that the sign must be an indication of ownership and that “Trespassers W.” must be the name of the person who lived there. Once Piglet reaches this conclusion and attaches a personal history to his interpretation, no one can convince him that he is wrong. He has deceived himself in much the same way that Christopher Robin “remembers” the details of his father’s stories. Tremper argues that Milne’s linguistic play with the multiple meanings of the word “after” in Piglet’s explanation of his family history “remind[s] us once more how ordinarily oblivious we

are to the metaphorical nature of language which proves such an obstacle to the child attempting to master adult parlance” (Trember 41). Piglet, like many children unaware of or unwilling to acknowledge the limitations of their knowledge, supplies his own explanations based on what he does know about language. Eventually, the story becomes reality through this act of self-deception.

Notably, the humor of this episode depends on the ability of the child reader to provide his or her own, more accurate interpretation of the broken sign. In this and other episodes, Milne places child readers in a position of superior knowledge over the immature characters, allowing them to delight in their own authority as compared to the silliness of the characters. Milne trusts that his reader will have already encountered a sign warning off trespassers (such as “trespassers will be shot” or “trespassers will be prosecuted”) and will have some understanding of what such signs mean. This knowledge enables the child reader to be “in on the joke”: to laugh at the expense of the less knowledgeable characters. Milne does not condescend to his child readers, but demonstrates a remarkable confidence in their ability to appreciate sophisticated humor and wordplay. The humor of such moments depends upon the sort of “active literacy” that Gubar identifies in her study of Golden Age children’s literature (*Artful Dodgers* 209). Rather than explaining the joke, Milne trusts his readers to offer their own interpretation. He is not mocking children for their mistakes but demonstrating a remarkable faith in their ability to recognize the mistakes the characters are making. Though readers may miss some of the subtler jokes, their ability to laugh at the characters’ mistakes teaches them to question the explanations the text provides and instills them with a sense of authority.

Throughout the Pooh stories, Milne represents the challenges that real children face in developing their knowledge of language and of their environment through the adventures and misadventures that the characters experience. In this way, the real world seems to linguistically intervene in the fantasy world. Even in a magical forest where toys are alive, those toys are still subject to the malapropisms and misinterpretations that young children face in developing their own linguistic abilities. The difficulties are familiar to young readers and seem to add a layer of realism to the fantasy by reproducing the psychology and language abilities of a young child. In this way, readers are able to both recognize and laugh at mistakes similar to the kinds they themselves may have made.

Much of the linguistic humor in Milne's stories centers on this problem of language acquisition. Rachel Weissbrod notes that Milne's use of language "exemplifies how a very young child copes with the difficulty of mastering his/her own native tongue... Their speech is full of words and expressions they do not really understand" (257). Many of the malapropisms and misinterpreted idioms make sense in this context of linguistic acquisition; however, Milne does not simply represent these errors as the mistakes of naïve or foolish children. The adult narrator himself frequently engages in this linguistic play. When Christopher Robin questions the narrator's use of a common idiom to say that Pooh lived "under the name of Sanders," the narrator explains: "It means he had the name over the door in gold letters and lived under it" (Milne, *Winnie* 2). While Weissbrod explains this "naïve" interpretation of the expression as the narrator's adoption of "a child's point of view" (257), I believe that there is more at play here. The conventionally understood meaning of this expression would make little sense

within this narrative: it would mean that Pooh was living under an assumed name. Neither the narrator's playful explanation of the idiom nor the real one makes sense within the context of the story. The phrase seems to be inserted here purely for the pleasure of mocking the idioms of our language. Milne uses this tactic in several places throughout both texts to call attention to the idiosyncrasies of the English language and challenge notions of linguistic transparency. Milne suggests that idiomatic expressions undermine the possibility of clear communication since they foreground the interpretative acts inherent in all communication. Because such expressions cannot be interpreted literally, they provide the possibility for multiple, conflicting interpretations.

This linguistic play firmly positions Milne in the traditions of both literary nonsense and literary modernism. One of the hallmarks of literary nonsense that Kimberly Reynolds identifies is “the question of whether it is possible to use grammatically correct language or other signifying systems that the reader will recognize to write something which is entirely without meaning—something that has no sense” (*Radical* 46). Reynolds further comments that “literary nonsense has its own conventions and logic: as well as obeying the rules of grammar, it employs inversion and wordplay, mixes unrelated or contradictory items (usually suggesting an affinity between them through rhyme or parallelism), and tends to present things in terms of extremes” (*Radical* 51). These characteristics are all present within Milne's texts. Additionally, Reynolds explains that nonsense both “recognizes the arbitrary nature of language and... displays high levels of intellectual effort in attempts to master it” (*Radical* 54). The above discussion of characters' ambiguous relationship with linguistic authority seems to resonate particularly here. Through his seemingly playful use and misuse of language

and his emphasis on what Carpenter terms “comic literalness” (45), Milne presents a world that is governed by the logic of nonsense and suggests that the instability of language offers the potential for a disturbing destabilization of meaning.

Both Reynolds and Carpenter (as well as DusiBerre and several other scholars) argue that literary modernism developed out of the tradition of literary nonsense. Reynolds insists that both represent a rebellion against “the ‘certainties’ on which earlier thinking had depended” (*Radical* 55). Nonsense, though it developed as a distinct subgenre of Victorian children’s literature, seems in many ways to resist aspects of Victorian culture. Carroll’s Alice texts, for example, question the value of rote memorization and other aspects of Victorian education through their parodying of moral and instructive texts. In his analysis of Milne’s texts, Yarbrough asserts that “Milne’s verbal play,” much like Carroll’s, suggests “a rejection of Victorian moralities” (122). The characteristics of nonsense that Reynolds outlines in *Radical Children’s Literature* are closely aligned with the characteristics of modernism she identifies in her article for *Keywords in Children’s Literature*: both definitions center on the idea of “tendency to play with language and meaning” and “wordplay that calls into question the tenets of realism” (“Modernism” 152-53). Amongst the various modernist techniques that Milne uses, his linguistic experimentation most clearly demonstrates his affiliation with modernism. Through his use of repetition and his attention to the problems of language and meaning, Milne’s adaptation of nonsense techniques connects him to Gertrude Stein and other mainstream modernist writers who have similarly drawn inspiration from the nonsense tradition in their own linguistic experiments.

Interplay between Textual and Visual Elements

Milne's linguistic play extends beyond questions of language and meaning to the visual representation of the words on the page. Milne experiments with the page as a visual medium and disrupts readers' expectations about the relationship between textual and visual elements. He uses blank space to represent shifts between the frame story and the embedded narrative. Building off of earlier experiments with narrative by writers like Carroll, Milne makes use of visual and typographical elements to both interrupt and expand upon the narrative. Within the embedded narrative, Milne represents the intrusions of the frame narrative by using italics and parenthesis to set those elements apart from the story. He rejects the rules of standard capitalization, and instead uses capitalization to indicate the relative importance of particular words or states of being—creating a unique grammatical style that is often imitated today. The words do not always follow a standard left-to-right progression from the top to the bottom of the page. Illustrations sometimes interrupt lines of text, and sometimes interrupt the middle of a sentence (see images 2-6). Reflecting on this unconventional placement of illustrations, Connolly observes: "Paragraphs and words circle around and between illustrations, so that they become woven together as a unified text" (*Recovering Arcadia* 55). The text and the images are interwoven and interdependent.

The words and images in the Pooh books depend on one another to provide a fuller understanding of the narrative. In many places, visual typography and the illustrations provided by E.H. Shephard add a deeper level of understanding to the text by providing a multi-modal experience for the reader. Connolly argues that "Shepard's illustrations of the Forest principally support Milne's text by offering a clear physical

sense of this place”—thus suggesting that “the Forest is very real indeed” (*Recovering Arcadia* 53). She asserts that Shepard emphasizes that the characters are toys by juxtaposing “the simple line drawings” of the toys with the realism of the Forest—seamlessly blending elements of fantasy and realism. In this way, the illustrations serve as a constant reminder that the stories are a fictional construct. Both the setting and the toys are “real” in a sense—the Milne family farm and Christopher Milne’s toys served as models for Shepard’s illustrations. But the relative simplicity of the animals set against the richness of the Forest emphasizes that the animals’ adventures are pure fantasy. Even when the narrator does not directly intrude, the illustrations will not allow readers to forget that Pooh and his friends are merely toys (see images 7 and 8).

Beyond this issue of positioning and interweaving, Milne also uses the visual arrangement of the text to mirror a character’s action in places. He uses a long, thin line of text to describe Pooh climbing a tree (see image 9), and the text that describes Piglet’s ride in Kanga’s pouch seems to be bouncing along the page (see image 10). In each of these instances, the eyes must follow the words as though they were observing the physical action. The typography serves as a way of mimicking the physical experience that the narrator describes. Connolly asserts that “such forms clearly add to the story by suggesting movement through the visual cues of the printed word” (*Recovering Arcadia* 51). The humor of this visual representation is one example Tremper cites of “jokes that seem to be made more for the reading adult than for the listening child” (41), but I would argue that even pre-literate children are familiar with the conventions of what text *should* look like on a page. Since these are picture books, even a child that cannot read for him or herself is likely to be looking at the page and can still see that the words mirror the

action that the adult reader is describing. Through all of these aspects of typography and composition, Milne creates a symbiotic relationship between image and text. The interplay between the visual and the written words represents a distinctly modern heteroglossia.

The illustrations also serve to soften some of the harsher aspects of certain characters. In his “Preface to Parents” at the start of *The Christopher Robin Verses*, Milne argues that in order to provide an accurate portrayal of childhood, one must show both the “brutal egotism of the child” and “the physical beauty which softens it” (vi). He argues that to emphasize one and ignore the other would be false and sentimental “for sentimentality is merely an appeal to emotions not warranted by the facts” (vi). Milne insists that these two characteristics must be balanced in representations of children. He does not argue that the physical beauty makes up for the egotism, but simply asserts that both aspects are essential in an accurate portrayal. The child’s beauty disguises the inner ugliness that may be present, allowing adults to fall prey to a false conception of the child’s innocence. Such a false reading is apparent in Milne’s poem “Vespers,” in which he depicts the self-centered and pro forma prayers of a young child counterpoised with the sentimentalized perspective of an adult observer. According to Milne’s theory, the best depictions of children will simultaneously alert readers to both the egotism and the beauty, demonstrating the heartlessness of children (to borrow a term used by both Milne and Barrie) while also providing “charm enough to give it at least a surface covering” (vi).

Where the characters’ actions and words lack the necessary charm, Shepard’s illustrations provide it. Milne himself acknowledges that “it is easy...to paint a beautiful

child, but it is not easy to describe one” (vi). Perhaps for this reason, Milne’s textual depiction tends to emphasize the egotism, selfishness, and greed of many of the characters rather than their more appealing qualities. The illustrations work with the text to soften some of the harsher and more egotistical traits that the characters present. Eeyore, for example, would be perfectly insufferable if not for the sympathy that Shephard’s illustrations evoke via his droopy ears and patched tail. Piglet, too, would seem far more obnoxious at times if the images were not there to remind readers of the small stature that provokes his feelings of inferiority. The illustrations of Christopher Robin similarly soften his character by emphasizing his androgynous youth and seemingly innocent beauty. The illustrations do not negate or erase the less admirable characteristics of these characters. Instead, the tension between the text and the visual helps to balance out the representations within the text – to show that children can be both charming and egotistical at the same time.

In other places, Shephard’s images provide information that is absent from or directly contradicts the written text. When Pooh requests “a Sustaining Book” to comfort him while he is wedged in Rabbit’s front door, the ironic illustration shows *Christopher Robin* reading to him from an alphabet book, with the page turned to “J: JAM” (see image 11). When Pooh and Piglet are tracking a “Woozle” around Piglet’s tree, the illustrations make it clear that they are actually following their own footprints long before Christopher Robin arrives to clear up the confusion (see image 12). The same is true when Pooh visits Owl on his search for Eeyore’s missing tail only to realize upon his departure that Owl is using the tail for a bell-pull; once again, the illustration subtly reveals the joke before the text does (see image 13). In these ways, the illustrations

become central to the narrative. The text and the illustrations each provide a relatively coherent narrative independently, but a full understanding of the narrative comes from their interaction.

In her analysis of children's picture books in the modernist era, Nathalie Op de Beeck declares, "Picture books are a specifically modern form of the sequential pictorial narrative; the picture book developed at a time when avant-garde art movements, sociopolitical climates, and changing technologies called for shifts in perception" (xvi). Op de Beeck argues that picture books are distinctly modern in their demand for a new way of reading. The interaction between the visual and the text in these books requires a perceptual shift as the illustrations become more integral to the story. Milne's Pooh stories exemplify this principle in the way that Shephard and Milne seamlessly integrate the textual and visual elements so that each relies on the other and the two elements are almost irretrievably intertwined.

Blending of Genres

Beyond this unique blending of text and visuals, Milne extends his experimentalism to a blending of genre. Having previously published two successful collections of children's verse, Milne makes liberal use of poetry in both texts through Pooh's songs and hums. This interaction between the genres of fiction and poetry reflects the experimental modernist technique demonstrated in such works as Jean Toomer's *Cane* and William Carlos Williams' *Spring & All*, two texts that Cary Nelson refers to as "triumphs of modernist mixed forms" (180). By integrating multiple genres into a single narrative, these authors challenge generic conventions and suggest that they are too limiting. One of the major developments in modernist literature and art was the

emphasis on multiple perspectives and ways of seeing or experiencing the world. Traditional genre conventions restrict those means of expression and condition the readers to interpret a text in a certain way. By blending genres, authors are able to provide a multiplicity of perspectives and challenge readers to experience the text in new and unfamiliar ways. While Milne's use of poetry does not necessarily unsettle the conventions of genre to the same extent as Williams' and Toomer's, Milne's characters often use poetry in unconventional ways—not only relying on it for self-expression, but also using it to further the narrative or offer a commentary or critique of the actions of the story.

Contrary to the general perception of his ignorance, Pooh actually seems to be the character with the most literary skills and the least pretensions of them. Poetry, to Pooh, is a completely natural expression of individual feelings. Like many modernist poets, he believes that everyday experience can be an apt subject for poetry; he does not differentiate between worthy and unworthy subjects. When he is tired, he sings a “Complaining Song” (Milne, *Winnie* 6). When he is proud of himself, he sings of his accomplishments. When he cannot remember what happened to his honey, he composes a rhyming “murmur” to convey his confusion. When he cannot make sense of Eeyore's comments, he expresses his perplexity with the song “*Cottleston Pie*” (Milne, *Winnie* 67). When he is feeling anxious, he invents an “Anxious Pooh Song” (Milne, *Winnie* 136). He sings when he is proud of himself, and he sings when he is worried. He makes up poems to express his relationships with each of his friends. He even sings songs about doing nothing. Poetry is integral to Pooh's identity, so it becomes an integral part of the narrative of his adventures.

Although some of the characters, like Kanga, express a lack of interest in Pooh's poetry, the inhabitants of the Forest generally demonstrate a high regard for poetry. Poetry recitations mark important events or celebrations, and Pooh even has some success in using poetry to motivate action. When Pooh, Piglet, and Owl are trapped in Owl's house after the wind knocks down Owl's tree, Pooh figures out a way to get Piglet out of the wreckage so that he can go for help. Because the plan sounds somewhat dangerous, Piglet is reluctant to participate until Pooh offers an incentive. Pooh persuades Piglet that "if you save us all, it will be a Very Grand Thing to talk about afterwards, and perhaps I'll make up a Song, and people will say 'It was so grand what Piglet did that a Respectful Pooh Song was made about it'" (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 143). The suggestion of this Respectful Pooh Song is enough to convince Piglet to attempt the rescue mission. Later, when Pooh shares the song with Piglet, Piglet is overcome with pride. The song convinces Piglet that he was braver than he thought and gives him the courage to do "a Noble Thing" later by putting someone else's needs ahead of his own. Poetry here serves a practical purpose in furthering the plot. The honor of having a poem written about him spurs Piglet to action.

In other places, Pooh's hums provide a narrative of the adventures that are taking place—offering a self-reflexive commentary on the text. He does not always require an audience; he is often quite content to sing for his own entertainment. Yarbrough observes that "[Pooh's] performances are for self-satisfaction...demonstrating a metafictionality about them that is one of the hallmarks of modernism" (82). Pooh narrates his own adventures by making up songs about their "Expotition" to the North Pole (Milne, *Winnie* 107), about their quest to find food for Tigger (Milne, *Pooh Corner*

32), about the experience of being trapped in Owl's fallen tree (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 140), and about the conflict between Tigger and Rabbit (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 112). In these instances, the poetry offers further insights about the events that are taking place. Pooh's songs sometimes provide additional details or an alternative perspective on the adventure, and at other times they provide insightful commentary on the situation at hand. In the hum about Tigger and Rabbit, for example, Pooh astutely observes that Tigger's bouncing would not bother Rabbit as much if they were closer in size. The song of the North Pole adventure highlights the group's ignorance about the object for which they are searching—defining the North Pole as “a Thing you Discover” and acknowledging that “none of them knew” where to find it (Milne, *Winnie* 107). These poems provide Milne with an opportunity for critical reflection on the text within the narrative itself. While the characters seem to take these adventures very seriously, Pooh's hums suggest a self-reflective awareness of the absurdity and irrationality of the proceedings.

By allowing these poems to emerge from the mind of Pooh—a character with no pretensions to knowledge—Milne highlights the difference between the elitist, pedantic characters and those with “little Brain” but genuine insights. While Pooh is himself a frequent victim of misinterpretations, delusions, and his own greed, he seems to be less egotistical than the other characters. Though he sometimes seems overly proud of his poems, he often disavows his responsibility for their creation. Because he is not preoccupied with his own self-importance, Pooh seems more capable of recognizing his mistakes; he acknowledges that his greed and foolishness often lead him into trouble. He does not necessarily learn from these recognitions; his greed for honey is a constant source of trouble throughout the tales, but he is at least more aware of his own flaws than

the others. This self-reflection makes Pooh seem wiser than the “learned” characters who never acknowledge their own limitations.

Milne elevates an alternative form of wisdom—the wisdom of physical experience—over the kind of pedantic wisdom that can be faked. Pooh is constantly living in the moment. He embraces life’s physical pleasures and offers self-reflexive observations that describe both the characteristics of himself and his friends and the events that transpire. Yarbrough argues that “the self-reflexivity of characters like Pooh, Piglet, and Eeyore...is but one characteristic of literary modernist techniques in the text” and cites “avoidance of teleology, free indirect speech, irony, [and] punning” as further examples of Milne’s modernist techniques (176). While all of these traits are present in Milne’s writing, the meta-commentary provided by Pooh, the foregrounding of questions of language and meaning, and the frequent intrusions of the normative world seem to me the most distinctly modernist characteristics because they continually violate conventional narrative structure and prevent readers from fully immersing themselves in the fantasy world.

Pooh’s Experimental Poetry

While Pooh’s hums often provide a sort of self-reflexive commentary on the narrative, they are at the same time engaging with many of the linguistic innovations of modernist poetry. In many respects, Pooh’s poetics mirror Gertrude Stein’s. Both make use of words divorced from meaning; both delight in linguistic play; and both privilege sound over sense. In this and other poems, Pooh even relies on Stein’s technique of repetition with a difference, or *insistence*. Shattuck describes this technique as contributing to Stein’s concept of the continuous present, wherein “an infinitely long

series of details constantly turns back upon itself” creating “an illusion of movement in stillness” (347). Stein describes this technique herself in “Composition as Explanation,” as “an including everything and a beginning again and again within a very small thing” (518). Pooh’s poetry does this, in effect, by creating a series of lines that all revolve around an impression. He does this most clearly in his poem about snow. As the poem progresses, he provides a little more detail about the snow and how it affects his perceptions, observing in a similar series of repetitive building lines that “nobody knows...how cold my toes...are growing” (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 4). The poem is very much situated in the present moment of experience: “it goes/ on snowing” throughout the poem. This small moment in time becomes the focus of the entire poem. The *insistence* contributes to the sense of the continuous present.

Like Stein, Pooh uses words as raw materials for his poetry. He conveys his thoughts and impressions without worrying about the meaning of the lines or the words themselves. Pooh’s poetry has the spontaneity that Stein valued in her own work. Pooh’s childish qualities allow him to demonstrate the kind of poetry Stein describes in her “Transatlantic Interview,” when she argues that “the only thing that is spontaneously poetic is children. Children themselves are poetry. The poetry of adults... is too intentional. It is too much mixed up with everything else” (23). Believing that the child’s vision is unencumbered by the burdens and expectations that adult poets face, many modernist poets and artists sought to recover the purity of that vision in their own works. While this view of childhood may seem sentimental or essentialist, it makes sense in terms of the modernist credo to “make it new.” Stein’s view of poetry in terms of experiencing language anew justifies her claim that children are “spontaneously poetic,”

in the sense that children are, quite literally, encountering many words for the first time. Stein tries to recapture this initial experience of words divorced from meaning in much of her experimental poetry. Despite—or perhaps because of—his lack of pretensions to knowledge, Pooh appropriates many of the techniques of experimental modernist poetry.

Pooh's explanations of his poetics rely heavily on the logic of nonsense. When Pooh experiences writer's block, his plan for overcoming it seems rather silly. He declares: "I shall sing that first line twice, and perhaps if I sing it very quickly, I shall find myself singing the third and fourth lines before I have time to think of them, and that will be a Good Song" (Milne, *Winnie* 100). While this plan seems nonsensical, it actually works and Pooh is very pleased with the results. As Stanger notes, "Pooh unknowingly describes himself as of a semiotic disposition, being open to his instinctual drives as they affect language making" (44). For Pooh, poetry is not a carefully constructed piece of art, but rather a free and immediate flow of language as it occurs to one. In many ways, his poetic methods bear a resemblance to the automatic writing of surrealism. Describing this methodology, Andre Breton defines its object as "a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought*" (727). In essence, this is what Pooh does when he composes a hum; he recites it as it comes to him, without allowing logic or reason to intrude into the poetic process. Much of his poetry develops out of what Breton terms "the disinterested play of thought" (729). Poetry, for Pooh, is the result of free-flowing thought and linguistic play rather than artistic work.

Pooh's poetry dabbles with several different types of modernist experiments with language. While both Stein and the surrealists share an interest in pure expression and the liberating qualities of the child's perspective, Stein regards poetry as a craft that one must hone. Unlike the surrealists, who seek to merge reality with the dream state, Stein's focus is coming up with a new way of representing reality. Borrowing from cubist art, she aims to create a new kind of literary work where "each part of a composition" is "as important as the whole" (Stein, "Transatlantic Interview" 15). Rather than seeking a new kind of reality or *surreality*, as Breton describes, Stein wants to create a new type of realism—what she calls "the realism of the composition of my thoughts" ("Transatlantic Interview" 16). Pooh's poetry borrows from each of these methods, at times also borrowing from other schools of modern poetry, but he does not strictly adhere to any one methodology. Pooh is not a very self-reflective poet, nor is he a proponent of any particular school of poetry. His poetry, however, demonstrates the subtle influence of Milne's contemporaries.

In his explanations of poetry, Pooh shares much in common with the surrealists. When Piglet questions the logic of another of his poems, Pooh declares that he is not responsible for the nonsense. Referring to the line "whatever his weight in pounds, shillings and ounces," Piglet says that he likes everything "except the shillings...I don't think they ought to be there" (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 32-33). Pooh asserts that "They wanted to come in after the pounds...so I let them" and adds his belief that "it is the best way to write poetry, letting things come" (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 33). In a later episode, he explains that "Poetry and Hums aren't things which you get, they're things which get *you*. And all you can do is to go where they can find you" (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 147-48).

Pooh's philosophy of poetry suggests that the poet has a minimal role in the creation of a poem. Like Breton, Pooh seems to suggest that the poet is a "modest *recording instrument*" rather than a creator (Breton 730). Pooh asserts that writing a poem "isn't Brain...but it comes to me sometimes" (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 83). A "Bear of Little Brain" can still be an accomplished poet because poetry does not require "Brain." The poem seems to be an independent creature with its own logic and desires. The poet's job is not to question or to shape the poem but simply to record it or declaim it.

Literary Nonsense

Much of Pooh's poetry seems to develop out of the tradition of literary nonsense—delighting in linguistic play and the pleasure of sound without any attention to meaning or purpose. In these poems, as in the work of many modernist poets, Pooh elevates sound over sense. Stanger refers to these hums as "Milne's most sustained language game" and associates them with "the early form of language Kristeva describes as the rhythmic pattern that is not yet meaningful" (43). Some of the hums make use of nonsense words like "tiddley-pom" (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 7) merely for the pleasure of the sounds. Some have no real words at all—as with the poem he composes entirely from the sounds "Tra-la-la," "Rum-tum-tiddle-um-tum" and "Tiddle-iddle" (Milne, *Winnie* 21). Still others use only real words, but offer little or no connection between the lines, as when Pooh sings, "I could spend a happy morning / Seeing Roo, / I could spend a happy morning/ Being Pooh. / For it doesn't seem to matter, / if I don't get any fatter/ (And I *don't* get any fatter), / What I do" (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 57). The lack of meaning or logical association does not bother Pooh, because he takes pleasure in the sounds

themselves. Stanger argues that “his hums, like baby talk, express the instinct to make noise” (47).

Much of Pooh’s poetry prioritizes sound over sense. Meaning and logic do not matter when one is formulating a “hum.” Reciting a hum about the cold weather, Pooh makes liberal use of sounds that suggest no specific meaning. He begins:

The more it snows

(Tiddely pom)

The more it goes

(Tiddely pom)

The more it goes

(Tiddley pom)

On snowing. (Milne *Pooh Corner* 4)

When he shares this poem with Piglet, Piglet expresses considerable confusion over the phrase “tiddely pom.” Pooh simply explains “I put that in to make it more hummy” (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 7). Both the use of this meaningless phrase and the repetitive nature of the poem suggest that the “poet” takes delight purely in the sounds he is producing rather than in the meaning or images conveyed.

In other nonsense poems, however, the lack of sense seems to suggest a critical response to the situation at hand. His nonsense hums serve as an appropriate response to other forms of communication that seem equally nonsensical to him. When Pooh cannot understand Eeyore’s cryptic comments, he sings “Cottleston Pie”:

Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie,

A fly can’t bird, but a bird can fly.

Ask me a riddle and I reply:

‘*Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie.*’ (Milne, *Winnie* 67)

The seeming nonsense of this song seems to reflect the confusion he feels while trying to make sense of statements he does not understand. In this sense, the nonsense seems purposeful. This song particularly resonates with Reynolds’ argument that literary nonsense “simultaneously purports to say nothing and points to meanings that may or may not be there” (*Radical* 48). The language of the poem makes little sense and relies on a very loose associative logic, but at the same time it suggests that there may be something more to it. The song has its own kind of internal logic.

The nonsensical quality of “Lines Written by a Bear of Very Little Brain” seems similarly appropriate, since Pooh writes the poem in an attempt to distract Kanga. The poem reflects on the confusing nature of ambiguous pronouns through a series of questions and assertions that seem to go beyond mere “noise” to proffer a sophisticated interrogation of language and meaning: “Now is it true, or is it not, / That what is which and which is what?”; “That hardly anybody knows / If those are these or these are those.” (Milne, *Winnie* 89); “I sometimes wonder if it’s true / That who is what and what is who.”; and “How very readily one sees / That these are whose—but whose are these?” (Milne, *Winnie* 90). This poem bears marked similarities to the nonsense poems found in Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* and seems to reflect an interest in semiotics, or the relationship between words and their meanings. Though the poem fails to distract Kanga, the perplexing nonsense of the verses makes sense in light of this intention. The questions, with their puzzling use of undefined pronouns, are enough to confuse and distract anyone.

Nonsense in the Pooh stories is not limited to Pooh's poetry. Milne makes liberal use of nonsense both in his linguistic play and in the adventures that the stories relate. Carpenter notes, "Each humorous situation in the Pooh books is reached by the logical pursuit of an idea to the point of absurdity" and "any plan embarked upon is likely to produce the opposite consequences from those intended (192-93). Wullschälger attests to the brilliance of Milne's use of knowledge by declaring him "the greatest nonsense writer since Carroll and Lear" (189). The similarities to the nonsense of Carroll's *Alice* books abound. Mirroring Alice's fall through the rabbit hole, Pooh manages to offer a self-reflexive discourse while falling from a tree. In another similarity to Carroll, Milne raises the issue of shifting identity when Kanga and *Christopher Robin* pretend not to recognize Piglet, challenging his self-concept by declaring that he must be a relation of Pooh's and renaming him Henry Pootel. Milne also makes liberal use of nonce words and misnomers, such as "goloptious," "Woozle," "Heffalump," "Jagulars," "expotition," "wolery," "haycorn," "mastershalums," and "tiddely pom."

Nonsense and irony are central to Milne's humor. Yarbrough describes this style of humor as "the humor of a post-war, disillusioned Modernist" (153)—suggesting that Milne's experiences in the war contributed to the satiric vein of humor that runs through his children's stories. Wullschläger finds in Milne's writing a "self-mockery" that she regards as "the death-knell of children's fantasy" (179). She further observes that Milne's distinct brand of nonsense moves beyond the Victorian nonsense tradition to create a more nuanced approach to nonsense. Wullschläger notes, "Milne retains just a hint of the anarchy of mid-Victorian nonsense...But where Carroll invented a wild, unrecognizable wonderland, Milne, the realist, paints children as they are, and brings

nonsense into the world of everyday” (189). Wullschläger suggests that Milne's use of everyday objects as the subjects of art and his disillusionment with regard to the nature of children make his nonsense more modernist than Victorian.

Many critics have drawn comparisons between nonsense and modernism—or, more specifically, between Carroll and modernism. Dusinberre and other scholars have pointed out that many of the experimental modernist poets were reading Carroll's works in their own childhood. Dusinberre argues that this early exposure to Carroll's nonsense helped these poets to develop their own brand of literary and linguistic rebellion. In fact, Carroll is generally regarded as one of the forebears of literary modernism, and Breton even directly names Carroll as a forefather to surrealism. In his book, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, Wim Tigges points to three major similarities between Carroll's nonsense and Surrealism: “the use of material offered by dreams and madness, automatic composition, and the probing of language and logic, space and time” (119). These same characteristics are present in Milne's Pooh stories. While madness, per say, is not a significant presence in Milne's texts, dreams and daydreams become important in more than one adventure, Pooh repeatedly references strategies of automatic writing, and “the probing of language and logic” is the most consistent thread throughout the narratives. Yarbrough draws a specific connection between nonsense and modernism in the Pooh stories, arguing that the performances within the texts “reveal modernist apprehensions and anxieties: reaching forward in existential angst and backward in traditional masculine epic self-aggrandizement, semiotic word play, and nonsense songs” (80). The nonsense tradition that Milne employs through his linguistic play has direct ties to the modernist avant-garde.

In Milne's lifetime, critics frequently compared his work—both the children's books and the stories and plays he wrote for an adult audience—with Carroll's, declaring that "the mantle of the lamented Lewis Carroll had fallen on Mr. Milne" (qtd. in Thwaite, *A.A. Milne* 135). Rather than trying to determine whether Milne's use of modernism reflects the Victorian tradition or the modernist adaptation of the Victorian tradition, I think it is more important to consider how and why Milne uses nonsense. Specifically, Milne's use of nonsense seems to challenge and undermine the possibility of stable meaning and stable narrative. Milne's nonsense poems point to the problems of creating meaning through language and often offer a critical commentary on the characters and their actions. While there is certainly a dark undertone to much of the nonsense of Carroll and Lear, Milne's nonsense seems to offer a more sustained and more nuanced cultural criticism. Whereas Carroll's criticism of the educational practice of rote memorization, for example, is fairly obvious, Milne's critical objects are often more subtle, perhaps contributing to the misreading of his texts as "simple" and "sentimental."

Most critics agree that there is something different about Milne's humor. In fact, this is one of the qualities that scholars use when arguing that the texts are too advanced for children. Many scholars, like Tremper and Barbara Wall, argue that children cannot appreciate the irony, puns, and subtly satiric jokes that pervade the narratives. Reynolds does not see this tactic as alienating child readers, but rather, references Wall's explanation of "double address," which Reynolds describes as the technique "of addressing a more knowing audience over the heads (or behind the backs) of the young people who are the implied readers of a text" (*Radical* 50). Wall insists that this technique "occurs...only in the work of the most self-conscious of writers" (21). While

Wall dismisses Milne's texts, arguing that they confuse child readers and "leave the brain unstimulated" (186), she celebrates Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories* for what are essentially the same techniques: "an acknowledgement that at any age language may seem incomprehensible" and a celebration of "an interest in words and meanings and a delight in richness of sound" (130). In Milne, however, she sees the nonsense and humor as missing the mark for child readers. Such condescending generalizations about children as a group fail to account for individual tastes, interests, or abilities.

Furthermore, Milne's humor does not only rely on sophisticated wordplay or subtle puns, but also on the, presumably more accessible, absurdist situational humor that results from Milne's use of nonsense.

Milne uses nonsense as a way of criticizing the foibles of adult society. Much of the humor in the Pooh stories results from the amusing situations that develop out of simple errors in judgment. The characters' misadventures often evolve from a single misunderstanding or misapplication of logic. The expedition to the North Pole is concluded with the discovery of a long stick, or "pole." Pooh and Piglet decide to build a house for Eeyore, and accidentally destroy Eeyore's existing house in the process. They build a trap for "Heffalumps" and end up trapping themselves. Their attempt to track a "woozle" resembles an absurdist exercise in futility, as they wander around in circles tracking their own footsteps. Rabbit tries to lose Tigger in the Forest to teach him a lesson, and Tigger is the only character who does not get lost. When Pooh gets stuck in Rabbit's front door for a week, Rabbit "logically" decides to make the best of the situation by using Pooh's legs as a towel horse. The illustration for this scene (see image 14) invokes aspects of Surrealist art through the reappropriation of Pooh's disembodied

legs. These follies—fueled by pride, ego, fear, selfishness, and attempts to “fix” problems without all the facts—are not that far removed from the problems of adult society. The attempt to help Eeyore, for example, parallels a larger societal problem with the misguided and ill-informed efforts of some charity organizations.

Yarbrough posits that Milne uses nonsense and wordplay to offer an alternative to “adult notions of accepted behavior” (119) and to “satirize adult codes of conversation and manners” (124)—effectively calling attention to problems and absurdities within Milne’s own society. Yarbrough’s explanation is somewhat conflicted, in that he argues nonsense is both an alternative to and an exaggeration of adults’ flawed behaviors. I would agree that Milne’s text is highly satirical and that the characters’ behavior certainly does not always conform to “adult notions of accepted behavior”; however, I do not think Milne offers an alternative or a solution to adult foibles. His characters’ own attempts at problem-solving are ill-advised and often bring about unintended consequences. Though they certainly represent a humorous exaggeration of adult behavior, they do not really provide an alternative. Rather, the nonsense in Milne seems the only appropriate response to a world that no longer makes sense. By relying heavily on the logic of nonsense, Milne not only aligns himself with his Victorian predecessors, Carroll and Lear, but also with Surrealists and other avant-garde modernist poets like E.E. Cummings who often employ nonsense as a method of coping with a corrupt modern world.

Inevitability of Loss

Milne bases much of the humor of his stories on the problems and idiosyncrasies of language, but he also uses linguistic knowledge—or education, more generally, as a hallmark of the initiation into adulthood and, consequently, the end of the fantasy.

Milne's fantasy depends upon a fantasy child—notably, a child who exists in some form both within and outside of the text. The adult author's fantasy of childhood is only sustainable as long as the child remains a willing participant. It depends on the child's supposed "innocence," or perhaps more accurately, ignorance. Once the child begins to mature and to learn, the fantasy unravels. The adult "author" created this fantasy for a specific child (a fact which Milne repeatedly emphasizes in the first book); therefore, the fantasy cannot exist without that child. Rather than positioning his fantasy as a story for "you" the imaginary child reader, who can always be replaced with another imaginary child reader, Milne makes clear the fact that his story is for Christopher Robin. By making visible the acts of creation inherent in storytelling, Milne also demonstrates that storytelling depends upon a willing listener—a child who can give life to the story. Once that child outgrows the fantasy, the fantasy itself unravels.

In *The House at Pooh Corner* Milne foregrounds the issue of *Christopher Robin's* inevitable departure from childhood as a way of disrupting the Arcadian fantasy. Childhood, Milne reminds us, cannot be protected indefinitely; regardless of the adult's desire to fix the child within a text, the real child will always leave it behind. Wullschläger observes that Milne's Arcadia is "shot through with a sense of disbelief and unattainability" and argues that "Milne constantly draws attention to the absurdity of his own fantasy" (191). Milne recognizes that no amount of wishing can prevent a child from growing up, and he suggests that it is the presence of a real child that entices adults to create fantasies about childhood. Through continual references to *Christopher Robin's* maturation and his imminent departure from the Hundred Acre Wood, Milne undermines the fantasy that he has created by emphasizing its dependence upon a child's willing

participation. The adult creator cannot control the child for whom he creates the stories. The child determines when the fantasy will end.

This idea, artfully demonstrated in *The House on Pooh Corner*, is more directly articulated by Milne's mentor and friend, Barrie. In his dedication to *Peter Pan*, entitled "To the Five," Barrie reflects on his decision to turn the stories he used to tell the Llewellyn Davies boys into a play for public consumption. He explains: "I was losing my grip. One by one as you swung monkey-wise from branch to branch in the wood of make-believe you reached the tree of knowledge. Sometimes...you perched ostentatiously on its boughs to please me, pretending that you still belonged; soon you knew it only as the vanished wood, for it vanishes if one needs to look for it" (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 75-76). Barrie's metaphor is particularly useful in understanding Milne's treatment of *Christopher Robin's* development. As *Christopher Robin* grows up and begins his education, he distances himself from the Hundred Acre Wood. Once he says goodbye to the fantasy world, the fantasy world ceases to exist.

Milne transgresses the conventions of secondary world fantasy by violating the sanctity of the fantasy world. Rather than maintaining a strict separation between the secondary world and the normative one, Milne constantly destabilizes the fantasy world by allowing the real world to intrude through his many subtle and less-than-subtle references to *Christopher Robin's* movement towards adulthood. When Piglet comments on "seeing Christopher Robin's blue braces" (70), readers familiar with Milne's first collection of children's verse, *When We Were Very Young* will likely recall the poem "Growing Up," in which the speaker associates braces (or suspenders) with maturity: "I've got shoes with grown up laces/ I've got knickers and a pair of braces" (Milne,

Christopher Robin Verses 101). The fact that Piglet remembers seeing these braces before suggests that *Christopher Robin* has been wearing them for awhile; he has already begun his movement towards maturity without the animals' notice.

References to *Christopher Robin's* education and lessons present a more substantial threat to the carefree fantasy world that the toys occupy. On one pleasant afternoon, the narrator remarks that "Christopher Robin came down from the Forest to the bridge, feeling all sunny and careless, and just as if twice nineteen didn't matter a bit, as it didn't on such a happy afternoon" (*Pooh Corner* 105). Here, the narrator creates a division between the world of learning and the world of fantasy play. Though *Christopher Robin* is currently in the Forest, the reference to his lessons suggests that the two worlds are mutually exclusive. One can be "sunny and careless" or concerned about "twice nineteen," but not both. Eventually, *Christopher Robin* will have to leave the "sunny and careless" world behind. In another episode, Pooh recalls, "There's a thing called 'Twy-stymes,' ... Christopher Robin tried to teach it to me once, but it didn't" (*Pooh Corner* 111). Again, Milne establishes a distance between the two worlds that cannot be breached. *Christopher Robin* cannot bring the world of learning into the Forest, any more than he can maintain the carefree lifestyle of the Forest after he leaves for school.

These subtle references indicate that *Christopher Robin* is entering into his school days and will soon outgrow his toys/friends. *Christopher Robin's* lessons begin to impede his ability to participate in the fantasy world. The growing distance between *Christopher Robin* and his friends becomes more apparent from his increasing absences from the narrative. In the story of the windstorm that knocks over Owl's home, Piglet

first expresses a desire to go and visit *Christopher Robin*, but states that “he won’t be there, so we can’t” (*Pooh Corner* 129). This is the second narrative in which *Christopher Robin* is entirely absent. Though Piglet eventually leaves to find *Christopher Robin* so that he can rescue Pooh and Owl, the character himself is never physically present.

Christopher Robin’s absences from the Hundred Acre Wood threaten the fantasy world. On the first such occasion, Rabbit goes to visit *Christopher Robin*, but discovers that his friend is not at home. Milne marks the significance of this moment by describing the silence that descends upon the Forest with this discovery: “Then he stopped and listened, and everything stopped and listened with him, and the Forest was very lone and still and peaceful in the sunshine” (*Pooh Corner* 77). *Christopher Robin*’s absence disrupts the entire fantasy world; “everything stop[s].” Though the Hundred Acre Wood continues to exist in these short departures, their tremendous significance is felt by both the Forest (which becomes “lone and still”) and the animals that live within it. When Rabbit discovers the cryptically misspelled note that *Christopher Robin* left behind (“GON OUT/ BACKSON/ BISY/ BACKSON”), his sense of urgency is clear. He declares that he “must tell the others” and “hurrie[s] off importantly” (*Pooh Corner* 78). The rest of the narrative centers on the animals’ attempts to figure out where *Christopher Robin* has been going and their inquiries for information about “the Spotted or Herbaceous Backson” (81) with which they assume he is traveling.

This chapter, more than any other, provides an indication that the Arcadian fantasy is coming to an end. Eeyore explains that *Christopher Robin*’s education is the reason for his absences: “He learns. He becomes Educated. He instigates—I *think* that is the word he mentioned, but I may be referring to something else—he instigates

Knowledge” (*Pooh Corner* 90). This explanation is further supported by the properly spelled notice that *Christopher Robin* leaves the next day. As his education progresses, his absences become more frequent. The intrusions of the normative world begin to disrupt the idyllic Forest. *Christopher Robin* is growing up and growing apart from his friends. Soon he will have to leave them behind, and the animals will lose their protector and benefactor. The Forest will lose its reason for being. The fantasy will unravel.

Milne clearly demonstrates the fantasy’s dependence upon the child by ending his stories with the child’s departure. The final chapter of *The House at Pooh Corner* provides a more explicit discussion of this parting of the ways:

Christopher Robin was going away. Nobody knew why he was going; nobody knew where he was going; indeed, nobody even knew why he knew that Christopher Robin *was* going away. But somehow or other everybody in the Forest felt that it was happening at last. (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 162)

The animals do not understand why their friend is leaving them, but they are all aware of his imminent departure. They all know that “Things were going to be Different” (162). Though the characters that populate the fantasy world do not understand that *Christopher Robin* is going away to school, where he will presumably outgrow them; the readers likely understand that *Christopher Robin* is leaving his childhood friends behind. Even children who do not believe they will ever outgrow their imaginary playmates generally recognize that “grown-ups” do not have such friends. Milne uses *Christopher Robin*’s departure to conclude the fantasy. Without *Christopher Robin*, there is no Hundred Acre Wood. Once he leaves, the story ends.

In this chapter, Milne disrupts the idyll and reminds readers that the fantasy cannot last once the child ceases to participate. The fantasy depends upon a child who is willing to believe in it. Connolly argues that the “imminent departure of the child who had been seen as the Forest’s protector fundamentally affects and reshapes the vision of this place as an eternal and unchanging Arcadia” (*Recovering Arcadia* 42). I think the significance of the departure goes beyond this. Milne is not merely demonstrating that Arcadia will change in the child’s absence. Rather, by choosing to end his stories with the moment of *Christopher Robin*’s departure, Milne self-consciously suggests that his fictional Arcadia will cease to exist without the child. Having used his first text to emphasize the conscious acts of construction inherent in creating the fantasy world for the child, Milne uses the second book to demonstrate the dependence of that world upon that child. Because the world was specially created for a specific child, it cannot exist without him. Without a child to play with them and give them life, toys are merely objects that sit lifeless on a shelf. The fantasy depends on the child’s willing participation.

In the final scene of *The House at Pooh Corner*, Milne emphasizes the tension between education and fantasy. *Christopher Robin* tries to tell Pooh about some of the things he has learned in his lessons, but Pooh mixes them all up. The child’s attempt to breach the divide between the two worlds fails. Eventually, Pooh begins to worry that he will not be able to understand all the things *Christopher Robin* will want to tell him “when he came back from wherever he was going,” and then comes to the sad realization that “perhaps...Christopher Robin won’t tell me any more” (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 178). The toy thus demonstrates an awareness of the finality of this break. *Christopher Robin*

struggles to find the words to explain his imminent departure and settles on the exclamation, “Pooh, *whatever* happens, you *will* understand, won’t you?” (Milne, *Pooh Corner* 179). Carpenter notes that in this episode, “a child tries to say his farewell to childhood” but “cannot find the words for it” (204). *Christopher Robin* cannot satisfactorily express what his childhood fantasy has meant to him, but he does seem to recognize that he must leave it behind him.

Many critics, like Lurie, view the farewell scene as overtly sentimental. Lurie even extends this claim to assert that it is “a sentimentality which rises into pathos, via the pathetic fallacy. In fact, the world of childhood and the past, our discarded toys and landscapes, will not mourn us when we leave; the regret will be felt by our own imprisoned earlier selves” (16). Stanger points back to the Contradiction and its claim that “the Forest will always be there” to suggest that Milne is claiming “that the grown child can return” (47). But, I think that what Milne is doing in this final chapter goes beyond sentimentality, pathos, or even self-indulgence. Milne is not merely embracing the idea that when we move beyond childhood, our childhood toys will “mourn” our departure. Rather, he is highlighting the fact that the fantasy can no longer function once the child outgrows it. Although Milne asserts that the Forest will always exist and that “anybody who is Friendly with Bears can find it,” this statement conditions the existence of the forest upon the presence of one who is “Friendly with Bears,” or in other words, a child. In the absence of a child, the Forest has no function. If it exists, it exists in a sort of limbo, waiting for a new child to arrive and provide it with new stories. Even if another child brings the Forest back into being, its formation will be different since a new storyteller will be constructing new stories for a new child.

Milne refuses to allow readers to indulge in the pleasures of fantasy without continual reminders of the impossibility of maintaining that fantasy world. Rather than allowing readers to pretend that *Christopher Robin* can remain forever young and forever a part of his fantasy world, Milne foregrounds the issue of the child's departure and its cataclysmic effect upon the Hundred Acre Wood. Fantasy worlds cannot last. Milne demonstrates the child's role in the creation of the fantasy. Without the child, the well-adjusted adult has no one for/with whom to create a magical world. Only through the child can the adult vicariously experience the fantasy. Despite his compensatory closing remark that "wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest, a little boy and his Bear will always be playing" (*Pooh Corner* 180), Milne's narrative establishes that the Hundred Acre Wood is a fantasy world that ceases to function with *Christopher Robin's* departure. Through his reliance on the experimental techniques and innovations of Modernist literature, Milne lays bare the inevitable acts of construction and revision inherent in adult conceptions of childhood. The real world intrudes into the fantasy one throughout *Pooh Corner* until it ultimately pulls *Christopher Robin* out of his childhood and shatters the idyllic fantasy world that he and his father created.



Image 1: Ann Thwaite, *The Brilliant Career of Winnie-the-Pooh* 75

THE HOUSE AT POOH CORNER

about half-past eleven on a very sunny morning, it seemed to Pooh to be one of the best songs he had ever sung. So he went on singing it.

Piglet was busy digging a small hole in the ground outside his house.



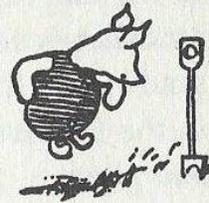
"Hallo, Piglet," said Pooh.

"Hallo, Pooh," said Piglet, giving a jump of surprise. "I knew it was you."

Image 2: A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* 60

TIGGERS DON'T CLIMB TREES

the acorn in the hole he had made, and covered it up with earth,



and jumped on it.

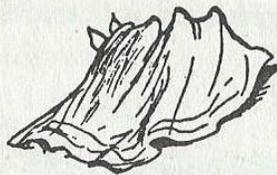
"I do know," said Pooh, "because Christopher Robin gave me a mastershalum seed, and I planted it, and I'm going to have mastershalums all over the front door."

Image 3: A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* 61

A VERY GRAND THING



across the room.



Then it jumped up and down once or twice, and put out two ears. It rolled across the room again, and unwound itself.

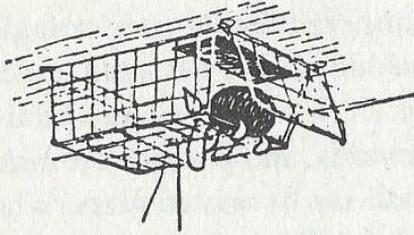


"Pooh," said Piglet nervously.

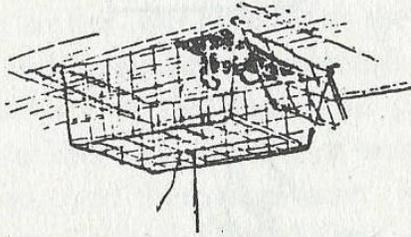
Image 4: A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* 136-37

“Up we go!” said Pooh cheerfully.

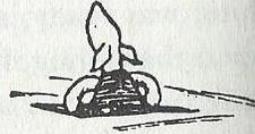
“The ascent is proceeding as expected,” said Owl helpfully. Soon it was over. Piglet opened the letter-box and climbed in. Then, having untied himself, he



began to squeeze into the slit, through which in the



old days when front doors *were* front doors, many an unexpected letter that WOL had written to himself, had come slipping.



He squeezed and he squoze, and then with one last

Image 5: A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* 144

“The rissolution,” said Rabbit, “is that we all sign it, and take it to Christopher Robin.”



So it was signed PooH, PIGLET, WOL, EOR,
RABBIT, KANGA,



BLOT,



SMUDGE,

and they all went off to Christopher Robin's house

Image 6: A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* 168

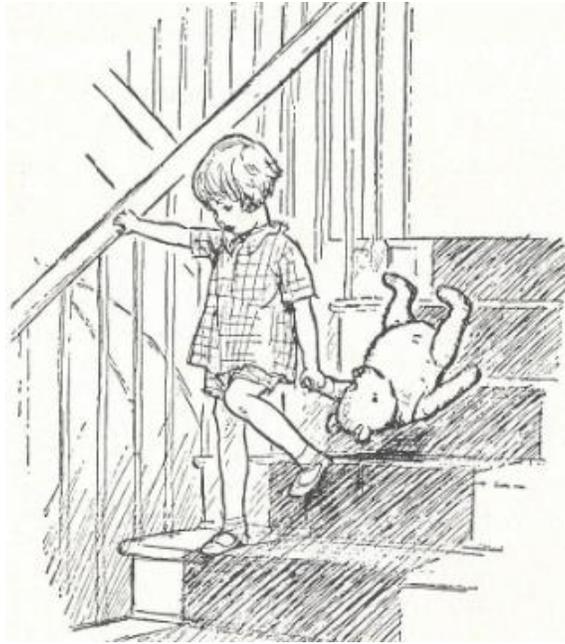


Image 7: A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* n.p.

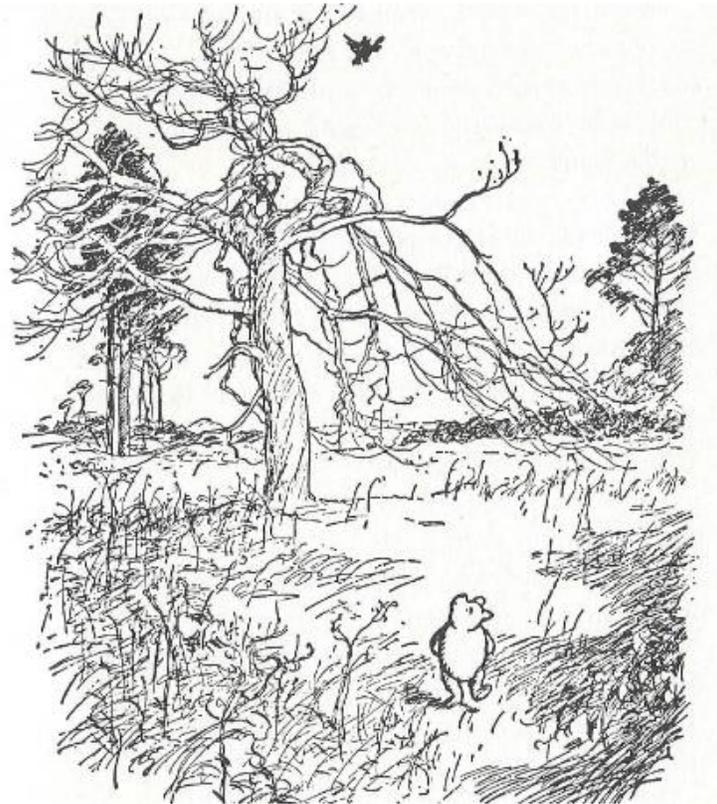


Image 8: A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* 20



He
climbed
and
he
climbed
and
he
climbed,
and
as
he
climbed
he
sang
a
little
song
to
himself.
It
went
like
this:

Isn't it funny
How a bear likes honey?
Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!
I wonder why he does?

Image 9: A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* 5

this take
"If is shall really to
 flying I never it."

And as he went up in the air, he said, "Oooooooo!"

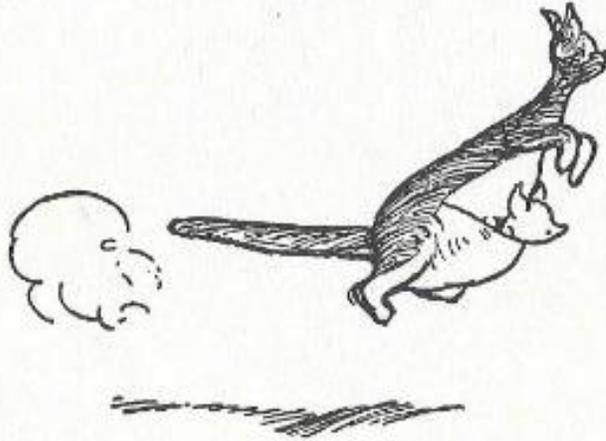


Image 10: A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* 92



Image 11: A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* 27



Image 12: A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* 33

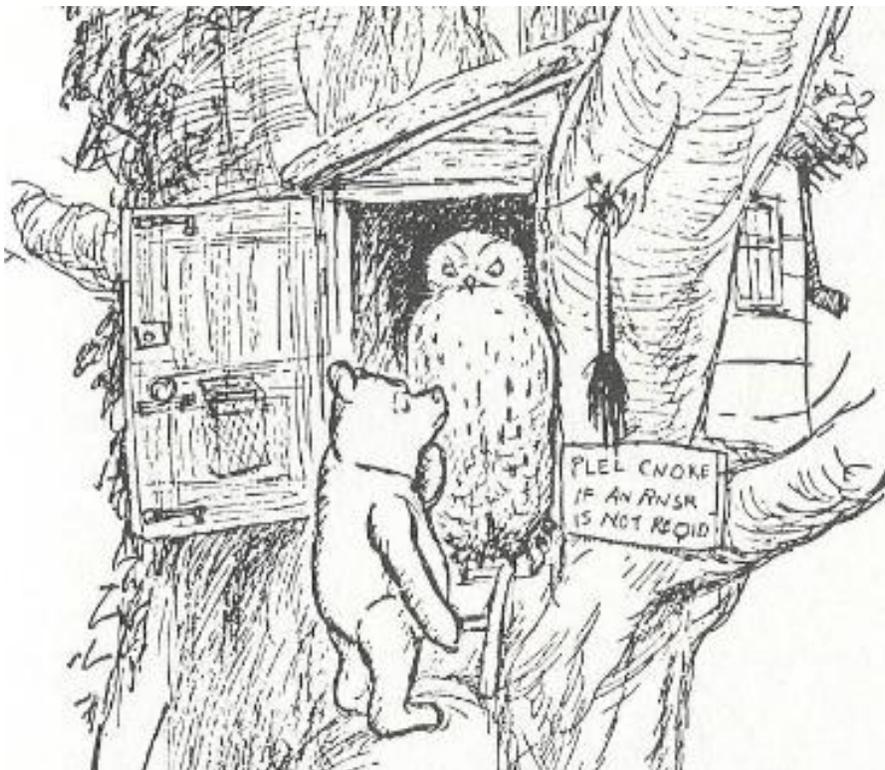


Image 13: A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* 48

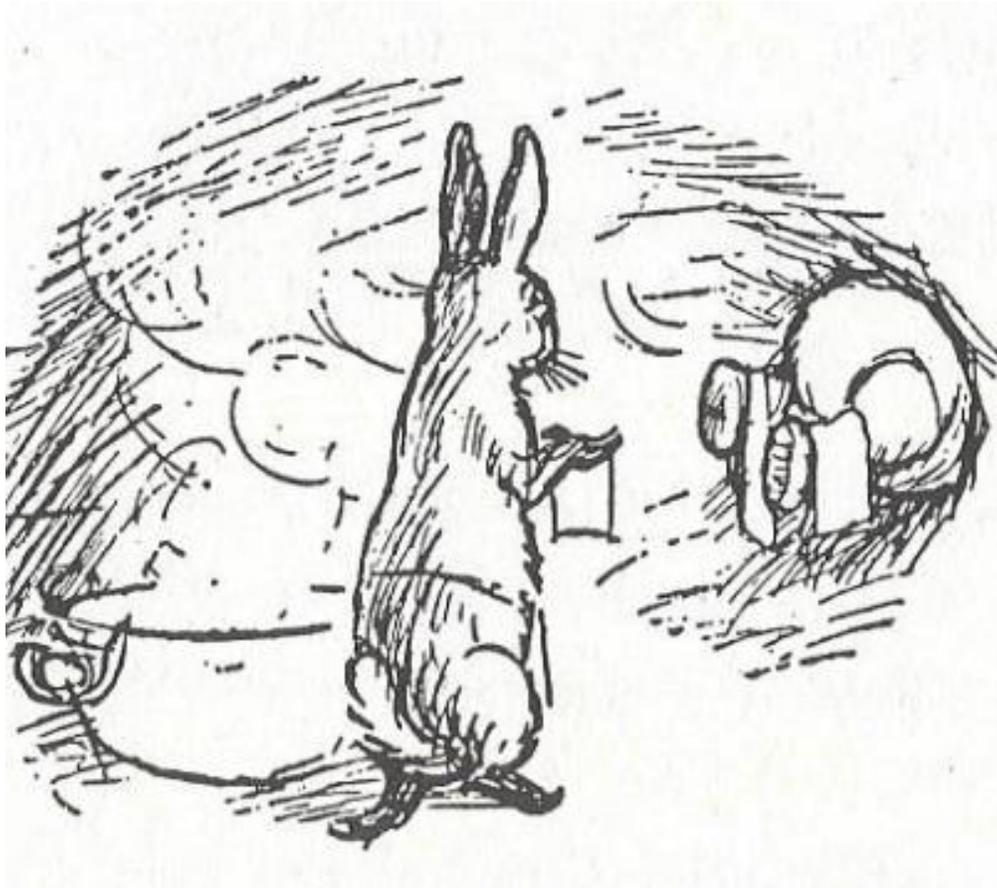


Image 14: A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* 27

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Chapter Two:

“And the world just went on being round”:

Gertrude Stein’s Subversion of Genre Expectations

Gertrude Stein is perhaps the most oft maligned literary figure of the twentieth century. Poet and critic Albert Mobilio once described Stein as “our century’s most famous unread writer” (qtd. in Watson 246). Both in her own time and in subsequent generations, her writing has been regarded as indecipherable, incomprehensible, babyish, and maddening. Public opinion branded her experimental writing “boring, repetitious, childish nonsense” (Isaak 24). Even some critics who admired her influence in the modernist literary movement, like Harold Loeb, dismissed the bulk of her work as “meaningless” and insisted that “nobody read it” (Loeb 11). Her writing did not gain popular acceptance until the 1930s, with the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, a text that is far more stylistically conventional than Stein’s earlier work. Not until the late 1980s and early 1990s did critics begin to acknowledge her central position in the modernist movement. Bearing this in mind, the success of her first children’s book, *The World is Round*, seems remarkable, since the text makes use of many of the same techniques that Stein’s adult critics find so infuriating.

Stein’s children’s books utilize many of the same modernist conventions she employs in her writing for adults. In *The World is Round*, Stein eschews conventional punctuation usage and makes liberal use of repetition and nonsensical language and rhymes. She plays with readers’ expectations of structure, language, and genre. Beyond these formal experiments and stylistic techniques, Stein’s text also engages with many of the larger ideologies of modernism – representing many of the conflicts and anxieties that

plagued her generation through her use of stream-of-consciousness and free indirect narration. She portrays the existential quandaries, disillusionment, and alienation that are representative of the modernist era. Yet, despite the text's linguistic complexity and its sophisticated philosophical questions about identity, subjectivity, and the relationship between language and meaning, *The World is Round* was successful with child readers and contemporary reviewers alike. Stein herself expressed pride in her children's books and continued to produce them even when she ceased to find publishers willing to print them.

In her lifetime, Stein demonstrated an extensive interest in writing for children. Despite a popular misconception that Stein only began to write for children when a publisher approached her about the possibility, Stein had actually begun work on *The World is Round* before receiving the inquiry (Ardam 576). After the successful publication of *The World is Round*, Stein wrote several other works of children's literature. She attempted to publish an experimental alphabet book entitled *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, as well as *Three Plays*, and *The Gertrude Stein First Reader*—all of which she intended for a child audience. Publishers rejected these texts because they believed that the experimental language and dark subject matter were not appropriate for child readers. Jacquelyn Ardam outlines some of the objections that publishers offered in response to *To Do*, most of which center on the book's difficulty and experimentalism. Stein never found a publisher for this second book or her later children's texts in her lifetime. *To Do* was first published in 1957, as part of the *Yale Edition of the Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein*. The first illustrated edition of that text (ostensibly marketed toward children) was not published until 2011. *The Gertrude*

Stein First Reader and *Three Plays* were not published until 1948, and were advertised for an adult readership at that time.⁴

Despite repeated rejections, Stein continued to seek publishers for her controversial children's texts. She refused to accept publishers' claims that her style was too complicated or her subject matter too controversial for child readers. Her persistence in using experimental techniques and addressing dark subjects in her children's books demonstrates a profound faith both in child readers and in the value of modernist experimentation in children's literature. In order to provide a more extensive examination of the stylistic and thematic innovations in Stein's children's books, this chapter will focus solely on *The World is Round*, as it was the only one of the texts published during her lifetime. In this book, Stein's experimental style perfectly mirrors the confusion, frustration, and struggles of a young girl coming to terms with the modern world. Stein engages with the psychological complexities outlined in the burgeoning field of developmental psychology and the uncertainties and disillusionment of a society ravaged by war. She embraces the characterization of her language as the language of childhood and uses her repetitious, circular style as a means of representing the inner turmoil of a child's mind. In her desire to present a more nuanced exploration of a child's psyche, Stein both borrows from and challenges many of the precepts of developmental psychology. She acknowledges many of the fears and anxieties that child psychologists of the time were exploring and documenting in their young patients, but she challenges psychologists' claims about a universal pattern of child development.

⁴ For more on these other children's texts, see Dana Cairns Watson's article "Building a Better Reader: *The Gertrude Stein First Reader* and *Three Plays*" or Jacquelyn Ardam's "'Too Old for Children and Too Young for Grown-ups': Gertrude Stein's *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*."

As I will argue, Stein's text both invokes and critiques conventions and precepts of language, genre, gender, and psychology to suggest the limitations of essentialist and romantic portrayals of the child and the child mind. Stein presents a child who seems to confirm many contemporary beliefs about developmental psychology but whose philosophical ponderings violate the precepts established in the field. Stein similarly plays with conventions of pastoral literature, quest narratives, and fairy tales to show the limitations of traditional genres of children's literature. She disrupts the Arcadian fantasy and the illusion of certainty that many Victorian children's books (fairy tales in particular) seem to promote by foregrounding the dangers and terrors that exist within the natural world. She inverts the traditional gender dynamic of fairy tales by providing an alternative, active role with which young female readers can identify. However, she also acknowledges the obstacles that young women face in seeking their own path and demonstrates that no child and no place are entirely free of the influence of adult society.

The World is Round shows how difficult it is for a child to resist conformity. Stein's female child protagonist, Rose, initially refuses to accept what adults have told her about the world (namely, that it is round and in perpetual orbit) and chooses instead to find her own answers. Rose sets out on a personal journey of self-discovery, but she is constantly plagued by anxieties and self-doubt. She worries about the extent to which her identity is dependent on her name (and by implication, her gender). Though Rose tries to make her own way in the world, she must eventually succumb to the gender expectations imposed by society and by the literary tradition; her story ends with a seemingly conventional marriage and "happily ever after" (Stein, *World* 67) that reinscribes traditional gender roles. Stein uses this disappointing resolution as a way of interrogating

gender conventions and the stories that uphold them. Insisting that “the world just went on being round” (67) even after Rose’s marriage, Stein suggests that the traditional “marriage plot” resolution that is so popular in children’s tales does not actually resolve Rose’s anxieties or her questions about her identity and her place in a round world. The problems that children encounter as they struggle to find their place in the modern world cannot be so easily resolved. Stein raises questions about gendered identity and coming to terms with one’s environment, but she offers no solutions.

Through her subversion of genre conventions, Stein rejects the comforting illusions of stability and safety inherent in many of the conventions of children’s literature in favor of a more honest exploration of the deepest anxieties of childhood. She rejects closure with her insistence on circularity and repetition and refuses to provide her heroine with any real resolution to her crisis of identity. Stein’s text delights child readers with its playful language and deceptively simple plot while also offering a complicated exploration of child psychology and an implied critique of established gender roles and the stories that uphold them. The text does not lecture on gender inequality. Rather, it allows young readers to draw their own conclusions through a realistic presentation of one girl’s struggle for identity and the seeming disconnect between her personal journey and society’s proposed solution (i.e. marriage). Stein interrogates the relationship between language, gender, and identity without providing any conclusive answers to the complex questions her text raises about these issues. In Stein’s text, the child’s world includes uncertainty, instability, chaos, fear. Rather than providing the reassuring closure and sense of rootedness that readers expect from

children's books, Stein insists upon recognition of the circularity and lack of stability inherent in the modern world.

Critical Reception

Despite the experimental nature and unsettling subject matter of Stein's text, the book met with relative critical and commercial success, proving to be one of her more successful publications. Both the first edition and second printing sold out not long after their 1939 publication, leading Ellen Lewis Buell of the *New York Times Book Review* to declare that "Miss Stein seems to have found her audience, possibly a larger one than usual, certainly a more appreciative one" (10). Despite her unconventional use of language and narrative, Stein's text found success with an audience of children who were able to appreciate the circularity and complexity of her tale. Indeed, many child reviewers cited these qualities as amongst the reasons they enjoyed the book. Stein had already gained popularity with the success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and her subsequent lecture tour; however, as Deborah M. Mix notes, Stein's "more difficult work, which is to say the work besides the *Autobiography* and the later *Everybody's Autobiography*...still failed to find a wider audience" (95). As Stein observes, "The American public were more interested in me than in my work" (qtd. in Mix 95). Although she herself had gained notoriety through *Autobiography*, her more experimental writing remained too complex and unusual to interest the general public. Thus, although Stein herself was already famous, her experimental writings were still largely unread.

Stein may have already found an audience for her autobiographical writing, but with *The World is Round* she gained a wider audience's appreciation for her circular and repetitive style. The characteristics that many considered to be too complicated for adult

audiences were somehow uniquely suited for engaging and relating to the child mind. In her contemporary review of the novel, Louise Seaman Bechtel asserts that “the publishers have tried it out on many children, all of whom were ‘surprised and attentive’” (131). Quoting several of the child reviewers, Bechtel records reactions that describe the book as “relaxing,” “human,” “dreamy” and humorous (131). One child describes the characters as “people who really feel things inside,” and another observes that “you can forget yourself and live in a separate world while you are reading it” (Bechtel 131). Referring to Stein’s characteristically experimental use of language and repetition, one younger reader notes, “I love the new style writing because it is the way I, or any other child, would think and write,” while another reader insists that “the use of words have you laughing till your sides ache” (Bechtel 131). Buell quotes another child reader who expresses an appreciation of the book’s circularity: “I like it because when you start thinking about it you never get anywhere. It just keeps going along” (10, 20). While many adult readers find Stein’s repetition and circularity frustrating, these child readers seem to recognize a kind of authenticity in this form of expression.

Adult reviewers similarly recognized that Stein’s experimental use of language seemed oddly appropriate for children’s literature. Librarian, critic, and children’s literature columnist, Anne Carroll Moore lauds *The World is Round* as “genuine child stuff” (qtd. in Susina 122). Buell praises Stein for her ability to capture “the essence of certain moods of childhood: the first exploration of one’s own personality, the feeling of a lostness in a world of night skies and mountain peaks, sudden unreasoning emotions and impulses, the preoccupation with vagrant impression [*sic*] of little things filtering through the mind” (10). Edith Thatcher Hurd notes that “*The World is Round* is Gertrude

Stein for everyone—child *and* adult—providing that one is willing to relax certain prejudices and ignore the absence of certain conventions” (41). In her discussion of the radical potential of children’s literature, Kimberley Reynolds explains that “children’s literature...is both a breeding ground and an incubator for innovation” (*Radical* 15). Building from the work of Juliet Dusinberre and Julia Mickenberg, Reynolds argues that radical innovations, both in form and in content, are more acceptable in children’s fiction because children’s literature “flies under the cultural radar” (*Radical* 15) and because “writers assume children will be less judgmental than adults” (*Radical* 16). *The World is Round* illustrates this claim. The book is highly unusual, but readers do not seem to find it as daunting as many of Stein’s more famous works, perhaps because we tend to think of children as being ignorant of conventions, both literary and otherwise. From this vantage, Stein’s authorial flouting of the rules seems playful rather than threatening, as if the author herself was operating as a child.

Indeed, many reviewers praised Stein’s style for its evocation of the consciousness of childhood. Buell directly connects Stein’s ability to represent these “moods of childhood” with her unusual style, or what she separately refers to as “this architectural structure of words which rhyme and rhyme again” and “the intoxication of words which keep ‘tumbling into rhyme’” (10). Bechtel similarly asserts, “For me, this is the first time that her style has spoken truly and artistically as perfectly fitted to her thoughts” (130) and admires Stein’s ability to capture “the child’s quick apperception, his vivid sensation, his playing with words and ideas, then tossing them away forever” (129). Stein herself counted her children’s books amongst her greatest successes, declaring in an interview that “what poetry I have done has been in the children’s books...My poetry was

children's poetry and most of it is very good, and some of it as good as anything I have ever done" (Stein, "Transatlantic Interview" 23). Though the book certainly had its detractors, *The World is Round* was, by all accounts, one of Stein's more successful publications, and many critics believed that children were a more natural audience for an author whose style was so often viewed as "childish."

Despite its success, recent criticism has largely neglected *The World Is Round*, perhaps because of longstanding prejudices against children's literature. A quick search of *MLA International Bibliography* will locate only a handful of articles about *The World is Round*; whereas a search for *Three Lives* or *The Making of Americans* will yield four or five times as many results, and a search for *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* yields even higher results. Additionally, the majority of criticism on *The World is Round* dates back to the 1990s or to the text's original publication in the 1930s. The recent resurgence in Stein criticism has not extended to a critical interest in her writing for children. Few critics have engaged in sustained analysis of Stein's children's books, but the "childish" quality of her writing is a frequent subject of criticism with respect to the books she published for adults. Though the interpretations of this quality vary widely, the relationship between Stein's characteristic style and the child's use of language remains a frequent subject of Stein criticism.

The texts that Stein produced for an adult readership frequently suffer from a kind of "childism" or prejudice against the childlike quality that many perceive in her work. Literary critics frequently consider Stein's writing style in terms of its "childishness," and the vast majority of critics use this term pejoratively. John Ashbery, for example, cites this childish quality as the primary reason that many readers "have not taken to Miss

Stein” and describes her style in terms of “a kind of lack of seriousness...characterized by lapses into dull, facile rhyme; by the over-employment of rhythms suggesting a child’s incantation against grownups; and by monotony” (108). One contemporary reviewer dismissed Stein’s language as “literary baby talk” (Killgallen qtd. in Hurd 31). These critics see the childlike qualities of Stein’s verse as an indication of the poet’s lack of maturity. In other words, since the poet does not seem to take her work seriously, the critics do not need to do so either. Such thinking may have contributed to the critical neglect of Stein’s work throughout much of the twentieth century.

More recently, critics have begun to examine Stein’s childlike quality in terms of the possibilities it creates. Critics like Juliana Spahr and Ardam discuss this childishness as a technique of defamiliarization—a way of revitalizing readers’ relationship with language by forcing them to experience words anew. They argue that in order to appreciate Stein’s work, readers must “abandon our fluency” with language (Spahr 46) and “put ourselves in the position of the not-quite literate child” (Ardam 575). Barbara Will notes that “of all modernist writers, Stein indeed seems closest to the linguistic sensibility of children” (340), and Albert Mobilio reflects that when reading Stein, “we are sent back to our earliest experiences with written words, when their size, shape, and sound were as consequential as the information they conveyed” (qtd. in Watson 246). Reynolds extends this recognition of a correspondence between Stein’s style and the language of childhood to an assertion that Stein was envious of the spontaneity and freedom of the “child’s relationship with language” and sought to emulate it in her own works (*Radical* 29). While much of this criticism still relies on an essentialist notion of

childhood experience, it points to a larger modernist preoccupation with the sights, sounds, and sensations of childhood.

Children's Perspectives in Literary Modernism

Stein is by no means alone in drawing inspiration from the language of childhood. As many critics have acknowledged, much modernist experimentation sought to recover the child's perspective, which was associated with freshness, liberation, innocence, emotionality, imagination, and spontaneity. Many writers began "to focus directly on the experiences of children and to explore the realm of a child's senses—colors, sounds, smells" (Hurd 9). Henry James, despite his dismissive attitude toward child readers, chose to center one of his adult novels (*What Maisie Knew*) on the somewhat inaccessible consciousness of a child protagonist. Other authors like Henry Roth (*Call It Sleep*), Virginia Woolf (*To the Lighthouse*), James Joyce (*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) and John Dos Passos (*U.S.A.*) demonstrate a similar interest in the interiority of children. Still others, like E.E. Cummings, draw inspiration from children as a way of experiencing life more directly and intuitively.

Outside of the literary realm, many modernist artists, such as Wassily Kandinsky, Gabrielle Münter, Roger Fry, and Paul Klee, tried to emulate children's drawings in their own art because they perceived children as having fresh, unschooled perspectives and an ability to present imaginative impressions (Wörwag 80-81). Kandinsky believed that "there is a vast, unconscious power in the child" (qtd in Wörwag 71), and Rudolf Arnheim argues that the child served as an inspirational model for artists who wished to break with tradition because "the child...is involved in the struggle for conquering the puzzles of a disorderly world" (17). Such artists viewed children as, to borrow Stein's

phrase, “the only thing that is spontaneously poetic” (“Transatlantic Interview” 15).

While much of these characterizations rely on the Romantic ideal of the child as being more “natural” and closer to the spiritual world (an idea that has largely been dismissed as inaccurate), they are still valuable for their expressions of artistic intention. These artists believed that children have a fresh perspective that could provide a new way of seeing, and they sought to reproduce that vision in their work.

Accusations of “childishness” hurled at Stein and other modernists do not indicate a failure on the part of the artists, but on the part of the critics. Stein’s childishness is not a marker of immaturity or lack of effort but rather an intentional strategy for forcing readers to experience words anew. To Stein, her unconventional syntax and repetitive style seemed a more natural use of language; she explains in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* that “she did not understand why since the writing was all so clear and natural they mocked at and were enraged by her work” (42). Because much of the reading public did not appreciate her experimental writings, she sought a more receptive audience—an audience that would be able to look past the unconventional use of language and appreciate the rhythmic beauty of her words. Since her work sought to capture a child’s perspective, one can understand the logic behind Stein’s decision to publish a text intended for a child audience and her faith that children would enjoy her work. Because her work is both experimental and experiential, Stein trusted that child readers could enjoy what adult critics could not understand.

Linguistic Play and Linguistic Acquisition

Adult readers often reject Stein’s writing because of its unfamiliarity. For those who are familiar with the conventions of standard written English, her resistance of

punctuation and capitalization, her wordiness, and her repetition come across as failings. Stein includes an anecdote in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* that attests to this very fact. When she first submitted her manuscript of *Three Lives*, the Grafton Press sent a representative to speak with her, because they believed she must have an imperfect knowledge of the English language (84). Many critics have acknowledged the similarities between Stein's use of language and that of a child or immigrant who is not yet fluent in English. However, in response to this criticism, Stein chose to alter her audience rather than her style. Stein rightly believed that children, who were less concerned about the strictures of the English language, would be more receptive to her work.

Indeed, Stein's playful and repetitive use of language, often relying on the sound rather than the sense of words, seems to particularly appeal to children. Janne Cleveland observes that Stein's characteristic use of language "mimics children's command of language in its dependence upon the physical pleasures created by sound and tactility" (120). Her language is the language of a child who has just begun to acquire verbal fluency and is still able to delight in the sounds and sensory experience of words. Cleveland draws a comparison between Stein's repetitions and rhymes and those of the pre-literate child: "Young children learning to speak repeat and practice words, often delighting in nonsensical rhymes and multi-syllabic words that feel interesting or funny on the lips and tongue" (120). Children remember and sometimes repeat these games even after they have learned to speak. The child reviewers of *The World is Round* essentially testify to this fact in noting that Stein uses language in a way that is familiar to them. Because children are able to appreciate the language of nonsense—enjoying the

experience of language that is “free from the deadening accretions of meaning that contaminate adult speech and writing” (Reynolds, *Radical* 29)—they are less likely to be discouraged by Stein’s characteristic style. In fact, one *New York Times* review of *The World is Round* observed that the book would be quite accessible to children, who “if they are not laughed or ridiculed out of it, have a grand time with the sound of words” (MacKenzie qtd in Hurd 32). Children seem to be the ideal audience for the kind of linguistic play with which Stein engages.

With this in mind, Stein does not attempt to alter her style or dilute her linguistic experimentations in *The World is Round*. But, more significantly, she does not avoid dark or disturbing subject matter either. Both her language and her content remain complex. Her only concessions to the genre of children’s literature are in the illustrations she commissions and the discourse markers and genre conventions she both invokes and critiques. Reynolds notes that her language usage does not deviate from her adult writings: “she makes few concessions to children and employs many of the stylistic devices found in her writing for adults” (*Radical* 28). In choosing to write for children, Stein demonstrates a profound faith in children’s ability both to enjoy her prose and to engage with the difficult psychological and philosophical quandaries that her writing poses.

Stein emphasizes the centrality of her child protagonist through her use of free indirect discourse and her experiments with syntax. Not only does the narrator frequently adopt Rose’s viewpoint, but the narrator also adopts patterns of speech that mimic the speech patterns of a young child. The grammar and syntax the narrator uses is almost

indistinguishable from the language of Rose's speeches. At the beginning of the story, the narrator includes a brief story about Rose's relationship with her dogs:

Rose had two dogs a big white one called Love, and a little black one called P  p  , the little black one was not hers but she said it was, it belonged to a neighbor and it never did like Rose and there was a reason why, when Rose was young she was nine now and nine is not young no Rose was not young, well anyway when she was young she one day had little P  p  , and she told him to do something, Rose liked telling everybody what to do, at least she liked to do it when she was young, now she was almost ten so now she did not tell everyone what they should do but then she did and she told P  p  , and P  p   did not want to. . . (Stein, *World 2*)

The repetitions, interruptions, and reiterations in this passage (and throughout the text) perfectly reflect the language of an excited child telling a story. The lack of proper punctuation creates a sense of breathless excitement and an impression of rapidity that one might associate with a hyperactive child. The free indirect narration aligns the third person narrator with the consciousness of the young and excitable protagonist.

The unusual syntax, grammar, and repetitions in Stein's writing reflect the rhythms of speech rather than the conventions of formal writing. Ashbery notes of Stein's characteristic style, "Like people, [Stein's lines] sometimes make no sense and sometimes make perfect sense or they stop short in the middle of a sentence and wander away" (108). Timothy Young similarly acknowledges the "natural" quality of Stein's unusual style in his introduction to the illustrated edition of *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*: "When we speak, it is natural to stop and start, truncate, begin again,

repeat, trail off...Stein had a gift for capturing the flow of spoken language as written narrative” (8). Anyone who has ever heard a young child (or a very excited person) relate a tale can appreciate the natural rhythms of this passage, with its stops and starts, its repetitions and emphases, and its vocalized attempt to return to the subject at hand (“well anyway”). Although the lack of punctuation and capitalization makes the passage look very unconventional, the rhythm reflects a natural speech pattern and provides a more honest depiction of speech—and especially of a child’s speech—than a passage that relied on the conventions of standard written English would. Stein is more concerned about representing speech in print rather than adhering to conventions of grammar and syntax.

The narrator does manage to eventually relate the incident with P  p  , but only after a stream of interruptions, clarifications, and repetitions that takes over several pages of text. Having not yet learned that language must be ordered and focused, the narrator’s words reflect her thought process. This stream-of-consciousness style of writing aligns naturally with Rose’s manner of saying exactly what she is thinking without filtering or arranging her thoughts. The narrator begins to tell a linear story, but breaks that linearity whenever the need for clarification arises or an additional anecdote or explanation seems relevant. This stream-of-consciousness is especially apparent in passages where Rose reflects on something, like what color chair she should take with her on her journey. Rose begins by wondering which chair to take on her journey, then poses an existential quandry, “Do you suppose that Rose is a rose / If her favorite color is blue” (Stein, *World* 35). She then jumps back to the question “Would the chair be a green chair or a blue,” but then her mind wanders to a reflection of what it will be like to sit on top of the

mountain. This leads her back to the central conflict that prompts her journey: “But always remember that the world is round no matter how it does sound. Remember” (Stein, *World* 35). Her mind then returns to the question of the chair and jumps from there to a reflection on “number 142” and the fact that “Numbers are round” (Stein, *World* 35). Like most of Stein’s narrators, the narrator of *The World is Round* seems to have not yet learned to self-censor, to distill from the stream-of-consciousness only the facts and statements which are necessary to a conversation and to put them in the proper order before beginning a tale.

In pointing to Stein’s use of stream-of-consciousness narration, I do not mean to suggest that this is a natural or universal characteristic of all young children’s speech patterns. Variations inevitably occur among different children as they do with adults. What is significant about this technique is that it enables Stein to represent a particular type of child’s discourse in print form in a new way. Most adults have encountered at least a few children whose excited tales follow the breathless and circular stream-of-consciousness thought pattern that Stein presents in these passages. However, authors of children’s fiction do not typically represent children’s voices or consciousness in the chaotic and rambling manner that Stein employs. While earlier texts, like *Alice in Wonderland* for example, have acknowledged the confusion, uncertainty, and dislocation that many children experience in their attempts to make sense of the world, Stein extends this confusion to the language and syntax of her narrator. The entire story reflects the circularity and disorientation of Rose’s struggle to come to terms with her environment.

Stein is not alone among modernists in representing a child’s stream-of-consciousness, but she is distinctive in using this experimental technique in literature

intended for child readers. Joyce represents the child's consciousness in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and May Sinclair uses a similar technique in the early chapters of *The Life and Death of Harriet Frean*. Roth's *Call It Sleep* contains large sections of the child protagonist's stream-of-consciousness. These texts, however, are all intended for adult readers. Modernist authors who have written texts for children, such as Joyce's *The Cat and the Devil*, Woolf's *Nurse Lugton's Curtain*, H.D.'s *Hedgehog*, and Marianne Moore's collection of fairy tales, generally minimize their experimental techniques. Though other authors, like Cummings, have maintained their experimentalism in their writing for children, Stein is the first modernist author to use stream-of-consciousness to represent a child's perspective in a children's book.

Despite this unconventional style and syntax, Stein's text remains accessible to young readers. The simplicity of her diction, which persists in both her writing for children and for adults, is key in maintaining this accessibility. Though Stein's style is highly idiosyncratic, the actual words Stein uses are not particularly unusual. She uses familiar language and common vocabulary that is comprehensible to readers of all ages. In her analysis of Stein's use of grammars, Spahr defends Stein against "accusations of unreadability" (35). Spahr draws a comparison between Stein's famous phrase "rose is a rose is a rose" (which reappears in an important passage of *The World is Round*) and Joyce's use of complicated neologisms in *Finnegans Wake* to demonstrate the relative familiarity of Stein's use of language. Spahr declares, "Her words are intentionally common, simple, and never esoteric. They...privilege what can be done with a limited vocabulary" (41). This "limited vocabulary" allows younger readers to access Stein's writing with the same level of authority as adult readers. Spahr argues that Stein's style

“draws her reader into reading like someone who lacks a conventionally fluent flow of reading” (28). Spahr connects Stein’s style particularly with “the semantic and syntactic tendencies of a range of second-language speakers” (26), but the same argument could be made for the linguistic sensibilities of a child who is still navigating the complexities of the English language. Both the child and the immigrant have a fresh perspective on the English language. Stein’s use of language seeks to evoke this unschooled perspective – calling on readers to experience words anew. Rather than merely appropriating this perspective for high art as Kandinsky and others do, Stein directs it back to a child audience, suggesting that they are just as capable as adults of appreciating her artistic endeavors.

In many ways, the child reader is Stein’s ideal reader. Since most children have not yet developed a “conventionally fluent flow of reading” (Spahr 28), they are less likely to resist Stein’s text because of its unusual style and more likely to enjoy the power and pleasure of her language. Stein herself apparently recognized that children could be a more appreciative audience for her writing. In his memoir of Stein, Samuel Steward records Stein’s assertion, “Children always seem to understand my books better than grownups” (qtd in Susina 123). Unbothered by grammatical omissions or gaps in narrative logic, children can appreciate the beauty and power of words. Words are the focus of Stein’s writing, as she indicates in her press release for *The World is Round*: “Don’t bother about the commas which aren’t there, read the words. Don’t worry about the sense that is there, read the words faster. If you have any trouble, read faster and faster until you don’t” (qtd. in Young 8). In Stein’s writing, the pleasure of words and sounds becomes central. Younger readers are more suited for embracing this pleasure

than adults because they are less familiar with the rigid structures of grammar, syntax, and usage conventions. While many adults are certainly capable of appreciating Stein's linguistic play (and not every child will), Stein's belief that children are a more receptive audience for her writing reflects a confidence that children will be less quick to judge her work for its absence of conventions.

Stein's use of language reflects the playful experimentation with words of a child who is learning to speak. Her narrators seem to be testing out sounds and playing with rhyme in the same way that young children do. Jo-Anna Isaak notes that "studies of child language...render intelligible some of the peculiarities of Stein's style" (37). Increasing attention to child development and patterns of language acquisition may have influenced Stein's linguistic experiments. In the same way that Kandinsky and other artists sought to capture children's perspectives in art, Stein seeks to recapture the experiential quality of linguistic acquisition. Kandinsky draws a direct correlation between linguistic repetition and children's delight in words divorced from meaning, observing that "frequent repetition of a word (*a favorite game of children, forgotten later in life*) deprives the word of its external reference" (qtd in Isaak 36). This game informs much modernist experimentation with language by privileging the playful relationship with language that such artists attributed to children.

In their discussion of developmental theories of childhood, Dorothy G. Singer and Tracey A. Revenson offer a more extended explanation of the relationship between linguistic play and linguistic acquisition. They explain, "As the child moves out of egocentric speech, linguistic play with phonemes and miscellaneous sounds, rhythms, and sing-song games help the child realize the flexibility of speech" (Singer and

Revenson 71). The child's use of puns and play with multiple meanings, they argue, "provides good exercise for vocabulary and also an opportunity to remove a thought from its context and use it in a new way" (Singer and Revenson 71). In her attempt to represent the thoughts of a young child, Stein incorporates much of this linguistic play in *The World is Round*, in lines such as "The wild animals could lie. / Lie quietly not die but just lie" (23) and "*Wild animals yes wild. / Are they wild if they are wild, / If I am wild if you are wild / Are you wild oh are you wild*" (23). Rose and the narrator demonstrate a growing awareness of linguistic flexibility through the reliance on multiple meanings of "lie" and the frequent repetition of, and questioning of, the word "wild." By repeating words and shifting the context or meaning of those words, Stein forces readers to constantly readjust their expectations and to focus on the words themselves. Both the narrator and the young protagonist demonstrate their fresh relationship with language by playing with words, testing them out, and delighting in their sounds without always having to form them into coherent sentences.

Stein combines repetition with frequent rhyming to emphasize the importance of sound over meaning, as in Rose's song about animals:

If a cat is in a cage

Does that make him rage.

If a dog is on a roof

Does that make him aloof

Or is there any proof

That he is a dog and on a roof.

And so

Oh

How could love know (23)

In this song, Rose's statements drift from sense into rhyme and sacrifice meaning to the pleasures of sound. Rose begins with a reflection on what makes wild animals different from domestic animals. Her second question begins in a similar manner, but quickly loses focus due to the lack of an appropriate rhyme for "roof." After this initial departure from her intended focus, Rose continues to succumb to the pleasures of rhyme without sense – prioritizing the sounds she is making over the meaning or logic of her song. Rose does not worry about whether her songs or reflections make sense to anyone else. She is free to play with words and rhymes without concern for meaning or clarity, engaging in the "favorite game of children" that Kandinsky identifies.

Developments in Child Psychology

Both in language and in theme, Stein's picture book demonstrates a clear understanding of a child's mind and reflects the larger trend within modernist literature to focus increasing attention on the experiences and struggles of childhood. Unlike the work of many of their Victorian predecessors, modernist authors writing for children resisted sentimentalizing the figure of the child. While their characterizations of children as having "fresh," "unschooled" perspectives rely in part on Romantic ideals, their stories for children acknowledge a more complex and diverse vision of childhood. Rather than idealizing youth, these stories address both the virtues and the limitations of childhood. Stein's text in particular demonstrates that the child's world "can be overwhelming and disturbing, unruly and unsafe as well as delightful and vital" (Reynolds, *Radical* 28). As Reynolds points out, "this is no sweetly innocent vision of childhood" (*Radical* 28). The

spontaneity and independence that Rose exhibits are accompanied by a resultant lack of control over her surroundings and even over her own emotions. Childhood is both liberating and terrifying.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed a new recognition of the child's vulnerable position. Sally Shuttleworth notes, "This was an era which witnessed the rise of child psychology as a discipline, and the first detailed analyses of nervous disorders and insanity in childhood" (2). She further observes that this era marked a shift away from concepts of childhood innocence to an increasing awareness of children's anxieties and fears: "The question of child terror or fear was a peculiarly engrossing one since it ran so directly counter to constructions of blithe innocence...which stressed the lack of accumulated experience in the child mind which might give rise to such extreme emotions" (Shuttleworth 42). Moving away from Romantic models of childhood innocence and idealization, both literature and society became increasingly concerned with children's vulnerability and need for protection. As concerned adults took legislative steps to protect "the right to childhood" against physical and sexual abuses, poverty, and exploitation, they also began to recognize the psychological traumas and neuroses that afflicted many young children. Investigations into child psychology began to recognize that conflicts, anxieties, neuroses, and fears were not only present in the minds of traumatized children, but were actually common in the developing minds of children coming to terms with their environment. Stein echoes this awareness of the struggles and fears with which young children must cope through her exploration of Rose's psychological conflicts about her identity and her place in the world.

In association with the “cult of childhood,” the early decades of the 20th century saw an increased focus on the mental, physical, and emotional health of developing children. The development and increasing popularity of infant care manuals, parenting organizations, and *Parents’ Magazine* (first launched in 1926) led to a wide dissemination of nascent theories about child development and child psychology (Cremin 290), and these theories inevitably affected ideas about the object of and appropriate subjects for children’s literature. The work of Jean Piaget was hugely influential in these burgeoning studies of developmental psychology. Before *The World Is Round* was published, Piaget had already produced five highly influential texts: *The Language and Thought of the Child* (1923), *Judgment and Reasoning in the Child* (1924), *The Child’s Conception of the World* (1926), *The Child’s Conception of Physical Causality* (1927), and *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (1932). These texts, published in multiple languages, were “widely read” and contributed to the rapid development of his “international reputation” (Brainerd 192). Piaget’s theory of cognitive development had a lasting effect on the fields of both developmental psychology and early childhood education, though they have also been widely attacked and criticized by more recent scholars.

Piaget’s theories outline several stages of cognitive development in children. Piaget argued that learning results from the child’s interactions with the environment. In her introductory child psychology text, *Theories of Childhood* Carol Garhart Mooney describes Piaget’s theories as centering on the idea “that children *construct* their own knowledge by giving meaning to the people, places, and things, in their world” (61). In other words, Piaget claimed that children learn through their actions. Particularly in the

pre-operational stage of development (spanning roughly from age two to age seven or eight), Piaget believed that “children are *egocentric* (think of everything only as it relates to them)” and “gather information from what they experience rather than what they are told” (Mooney 69). Children’s knowledge of the world at this stage is restricted to their own experiences and their own point of view.

Mooney explains that because of this emphasis on experiential knowledge, helping children find their own way of working through a problem is more effective than simply trying to tell them something about the world (70). In order to safely move through the preoperational stage, children must continuously adapt to new experiences through the process Piaget termed *accommodation*. Singer and Revenson explain accommodation as “the continuous process of using the environment to learn, and learning to adjust to changes in the environment” (13). The metaphor that Singer and Revenson use to clarify the position of the preoperational child is particularly relevant with respect to *The World is Round*: “The child sees himself as the center of the universe, with everything revolving around him” (12). Piaget’s theory of the preoperational stage of development illuminates the anxieties and difficulties at the center of Rose’s struggle to accept the knowledge that she is subject to the constant revolutions of a round world. In her treatment of Rose’s development, Stein draws on these newly available developmental theories to offer a more nuanced depiction of the modern child, but she also acknowledges the limitations of a supposedly universal model of childhood by contrasting Rose’s psychological development with that of her male cousin and by allowing Rose to pose abstract philosophical questions that extend beyond her supposed stage of development.

Rose's Psychological Development

Whether or not Stein was directly familiar with Piaget's writings, as a well-informed woman living in Paris amidst the burgeoning culture of childhood, she would have been aware of his widely disseminated ideas. In her study of the influence of child psychology on consumer culture, Amy Ogata observes that "mass manufacturers were quick to adopt psychological and educational research...to promote their products" (xx). Illustrating the prevalence and popularity of the child study movement, Ogata explains how ideas from developmental psychology and educational philosophies were popularized in books, magazines, and mass marketing campaigns, as well as through "the establishment of child study centers at major universities" (40). *The World is Round* reflects a clear understanding of these nascent theories of child development, adhering to them in part, but resisting the notion of a universal "child mind" that shares certain mental limitations based on age. Rose's developing understanding of the world initially seems to parallel Piaget's theories. Because Rose is still in the preoperational stage of development, she understands the world through her own direct experiences. She cannot accept information that contradicts her sensory perceptions and existing knowledge of her environment. Consequently, Rose is deeply disturbed by the idea that the world is round and in constant orbit. When Rose goes to school, her teachers inform her "That the world was round / That the sun was round / That the moon was round / That the stars were round / And that they were all going around and around / And not a sound" (Stein, *World* 11). Rose finds this knowledge "so sad it almost made her cry" (11); the information violates her more reassuring perception of the world as stable.

This incident suggests that Rose is not far enough along in her cognitive development to make sense of an abstract concept that threatens her entire worldview. In his discussion of the importance of stories in childhood, psychologist Bruno Bettelheim explains, “It requires considerable intellectual maturity to believe that there can be stability to one’s life when the ground on which one walks (the firmest thing around, on which everything rests) spins with incredible speed on an invisible axis” (48). While some children may be intellectually mature enough to accept this knowledge, Rose is not. Because this information contradicts her own experience of the world, it undermines everything Rose believes. As Bettelheim explains, in accepting what adults say about the world’s roundness and rotation, “children come to distrust their own experience, and therefore themselves” (48). Rose must either reject the veracity of her teacher’s claims or accept that she cannot trust her own perceptions.

The information is almost traumatic for the young Rose because it challenges everything she believes. Peter Schwenger asserts that “the problem is not so much that the world is round, then, as it is that the world is *going* around” (119). He argues that because “Rose herself is subject to that motion,” the round world is consequently “threatening the stability that Rose seeks for herself” (119). The fact that the world is in perpetual motion undermines Rose’s sense of stability as well as providing a direct challenge to her own perceptions. The world does not look round and Rose cannot feel that it is in motion. Because Rose has no experiential knowledge of this fact, the narrator informs us that “she did not believe it” (Stein, *World* 11). According to Piaget’s theories, a preoperational child could not believe a fact that so directly contradicts with his or her existing knowledge, experiences, and perceptions about the world.

Rose's anxiety grows from her inability to "reconcile her own sense of things with the closed systems of belief or 'master narratives' of adulthood" (Will 341). Though her teachers tell her "that the world was round" (Stein 14), Rose does not believe them because of her own belief that "the mountains were so high they could stop anything" (15). As Schwenger observes, "The world looks flat to her, stable and supportive" (118). Her physical perceptions are in direct conflict with the accepted beliefs. According to Piaget's theories, "All children must be able to understand the world in concrete terms before they can begin to think in the abstract" (Singer and Revenson 17). Having not yet moved into the stage of development where abstract thinking becomes possible, Rose cannot accept abstract information that threatens her concrete knowledge of the world.

More specifically, Rose seems to struggle with the transition from the preoperational stage to the concrete operational stage of development. According to Piaget, in the concrete operational stage, children begin to form ideas based on reasoning, but their thinking is limited to objects and familiar events (Singer and Revenson). Piaget argues that children cannot begin to think conceptually until what he calls the formal operational stage of development (beginning around age twelve or older). Since her ability to reason still grows out of concrete examples, Rose determines that the world cannot be round and in motion because the ground seems flat and the mountains appear stable. She reassures herself that the world cannot be round based on visual evidence: "Rose oh Rose look down at the ground / And what do you see / You see that the world is not round" (Stein, *World* 26). So long as her perceptions reassure her of the world's flatness and stability, she is able to dismiss her teachers' claims to the contrary.

Rose begins to wonder about the possible truth of her teachers' statements only when her perceptions offer evidence that seems to confirm this all-consuming roundness. Remembering an occasion when she was singing in front of a mirror, Rose reflects that "as she sang her mouth was round and was going around and around" (Stein, *World* 12). Although, logically, the roundness of Rose's mouth in no way supports the claim that the world itself is round, the child perceives this as potential support for her teachers' claim. She must now struggle with two pieces of contradictory experiential knowledge. On the one hand, the roundness she perceives within herself seems to validate the claim that "the world was round" and "going around and around," but on the other hand, she believes that the world could not be round and in motion since "the mountains were so high they could stop anything" (Stein, *World* 12). The conflict between these two perceptions causes Rose a significant amount of emotional and psychological turmoil.

Laura Hoffeld acknowledges this perceptual conflict in her analysis of *The World is Round*. Reflecting on the challenges children face in attempting to accommodate new information, she declares, "Sometimes facts lead only to confusion" (48). As she tries to come to terms with her environment, Rose has a series of revelations about her name, her identity, and the world around her. But rather than helping her to understand her environment better or to develop a more stable self-concept, each new discovery contributes to her mounting insecurities about her place in the world. Her teachers do not help her to understand new information about the world, they simply assert this information and expect the child to accept it. Not only does this approach conflict with Piaget's theories of development, but it also ignores the developments in early childhood education proposed by Maria Montessori and others.

Like Piaget, Montessori believed that “children learn best through sensory experiences” (Mooney 24). Montessori encouraged children to learn independently and “urged teachers not to interfere with the child’s patterns and pace of learning” (Mooney 29). In this view, Rose’s teachers do not seem to have the best approach to education: they simply provide information to their young students and make no attempt to help the students understand or process this information. Given the culture of childhood that prevailed in the early decades of the twentieth century, Stein must have been aware of some of the debates and discussions surrounding children’s education and its pivotal role in the child’s development. Ogata’s text provides extensive support to demonstrate the prevalence of new educational philosophies in popular culture. Discussion of Rose’s education, however, is relegated to a single paragraph. Rose goes to a school near the mountains with other little girls, she does not have “as much time to sing and cry” (Stein, *World* 11), her teachers tell her the world is round, and the information disturbs her. Stein’s only representation of Rose’s education is in the list of disturbing facts the teachers provide: that the world, the sun, the moon, and the stars are round and “going around and around” (Stein, *World* 11). That the entire narrative quest develops out of this single traumatic moment suggests the importance of children’s education. Since her teachers do not help her understand the information, Rose must set out on a physical quest to test their claims and discover their truth or falsity. Rose’s insistence on discovering the truth for herself reaffirms Montessori’s emphasis on independent learning. Stein recognizes that children must figure out some things for themselves.

Identity and Naming

Within *The World is Round*, Stein explores many of the difficult psychological issues with which a nine year old child may grapple. Ruth Hill Viguers acknowledges a wider trend in children's literature of this time to recognize children as "individuals in their own right, worthy of special attention to their unique mental, physical, and social needs" (437) and to keep pace with "educational trends toward the integration of the child and his world" (438). With Rose, Stein creates a character who struggles with a recognition of her own individuality and her place in the world. One of the first questions with which Rose seems to wrestle is the problem of her own identity. Stein writes, "Rose was her name and would she have been Rose if her name had not been Rose. She used to think and then she used to think again" (*World 2*). The question of the relationship between her name and her self-concept continually plagues Rose.

Beyond its obvious playful allusion to the famous line from *Romeo & Juliet*, Rose's reflection demonstrates a profound sense of uncertainty about her own identity and a level of abstract thinking that conflicts with Piaget's theories. As a child who is supposed to be limited to concrete thinking, Rose poses a philosophical quandary about the relationship between language and meaning, signifier and signified. The question is not merely an idle one but one that deeply disturbs the young girl: "her name was Rose, but would she have been she used to cry about it would she have been Rose if her name had not been Rose" (*World, 2*). The anxiety and uncertainty that result from this reflection cause a great deal of emotional distress for the young heroine; if her identity is dependent on language, then she does not know who she really is.

Throughout the narrative, Rose struggles to gain a sense of self that is not dependent on her name. Franziska Gygax argues that children often regard names as representative markers of identity (121). Gygax notes, “For [children], a personal name has an identity as if it represented the person” (121). Thus, Gygax suggests that children believe one’s name to define one’s identity. While this is not necessarily true of all children, Rose seems to be grappling with a similar belief. Extending from this line of thinking, the question Rose ponders has potentially devastating implications. Since a child does not choose his or her own name, this suggests that identity is not an inherent part of the self but rather something that is arbitrarily imposed by one’s parents via the naming process. According to this philosophy, an individual has no control over his or her own identity and the mere changing of a name could alter a person’s identity. Stein herself often contemplated the question of identity, reflecting famously that “Identity is recognition...I am I because my little dog knows me” (“Master-pieces” 309). Stein acknowledges that identity is dependent on recognition from the outside. She does not say “I am I because I know me” but rather “because my little dog knows me.” This lack of an internal sense of self-identification is what Rose seems to find troubling. The entire narrative revolves around her search for a stable sense of self.

The first of Rose’s “songs” reflects her preoccupation with this concern about conditional identity: in it, she first asserts “I am a little girl and my name is Rose, Rose is my name” and then wonders “why,” “when,” and “where” she is a little girl and her name is Rose and “which little girl” she is (Stein, *World* 3). Here Rose questions the conditions under which her assertion of her own identity remains valid. She attempts to find answers to her questions, but this only leads to more questions. She ponders, “And which

little girl am I am I the little girl named Rose which little girl named Rose” (3). Stein’s characteristic lack of punctuation and frequent use of repetition create a sense of both questioning and declaration. The declaration “I am I” is imbedded within a series of questions that centers on the repeated question “am I am I” (3). Rose seems to be simultaneously asserting and doubting her sense of selfhood throughout this first song.

Notably, several of the questions which disturb Rose surround her gender. While she initially questions the conditions surrounding both her name and her gender, she repeats the questions about her female status: “Why am I a little girl / Where am I a little girl / When am I a little girl / Which little girl am I” (Stein 4). In asking “why” and “when” she is a girl, Rose expresses dissatisfaction with her feminine identity. She questions why she was made a female and asks what conditions must apply for her to even be considered a girl. Rose’s conception of herself as an active agent conflicts with her understanding of the social expectations of femininity in her time. Neither her femininity nor her flowery name seems to her an intrinsic component of her identity.

Ultimately, the uncertainty becomes so overwhelming that Rose breaks down in tears. Some scholars, such as Hoffeld, choose to interpret this singing and crying in a positive light. Hoffeld argues that “the singing is a way of dealing with life and uncertainty, curiously suited to the human’s emotional needs” (54) and views Rose’s subsequent tears as proof that “Rose is in harmony with herself...she is in touch with her own emotions” (50). Such an interpretation disregards the melancholy aspect of Rose’s tears. The tears are not an expression of her inner harmony, but rather of the inner turmoil that results from her identity crisis. The narrator draws a direct connection between her song and her sorrow and notes, “singing that made her so sad she began to

cry” (Stein, *World* 4). Specifically, Rose does not merely tear up, but rather she “cried and cried and cried until she stopped and at last her eyes were dried” (Stein, *World* 4). The little girl cries until she runs out of tears; such an expression of emotion seems more indicative of grief than of harmony. Throughout the narrative, Rose sings several songs that interrogate her relationship to the world around her, and each time that she sings, she cries. Frustrated and confused by concepts that are too complicated for her understanding and by the conflict between her perceptions and what she is told, Rose’s only outlet for her emotional turmoil is through tears.

In one of Stein’s other children’s texts, *To Do*, characters’ names reflect an integral part of their identity. Ardam notes that “[Stein] insists that names are not arbitrary but meaningful” (584). For Rose, however, the relationship between her name and her identity is not as apparent. The name Rose evokes both the flower and the color. Despite her name, however, Rose demonstrates an affinity for the color blue. This fact seems to contribute in part to her anxiety about the relationship between name and identity. Providing us access into Rose’s state of mind, the narrator reflects, “Do you suppose that Rose is a rose / If her favorite color is blue / Noses can be blue but not roses but Rose was a rose and her favorite color was blue” (Stein, *World* 35). Rose is torn between the imagery of her name and her personal preference for blue; this tension contributes to the uncertainties surrounding her name and identity. Stein further emphasizes the importance of this color conflict through her insistence that the book be printed on pink paper with blue ink, thus visually representing the internal conflict. Throughout the narrative, Rose struggles to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory facts about herself in an attempt to understand and articulate who she is.

The obvious correlation between Rose's identity crisis and Stein's famous line "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" from her poem "Sacred Emily" adds a further dimension to Rose's search for a stable identity. Schwenger observes, "It is no longer a flower that is in question, but a little girl named Rose—a Rose who puts herself into question, questions her own sense of self" (118). Stein makes the allusion obvious in her first chapter's title, "Rose is a Rose" (Stein, *World 1*) and in Rose's later decision to carve the expression into a tree. What is interesting about this new context is that the little girl is disturbed by the fact that she is merely "a Rose"—one of many roses. Since the name does not uniquely belong to her, she is left wondering "which little girl named rose" she is (Stein, *World 3*). Since she prefers blue, she questions the extent to which her name is truly a marker of her identity.

Gender and Identity

Stein further challenges Piaget's notions of strict developmental stages by establishing a contrast between a male and female child of roughly the same age. Where Rose's identity is constantly in flux and seemingly dependent upon external sources, her male cousin, Willie feels no similar confusion about his identity. Rose's introductory chapter acknowledges that "Rose is *a* Rose" (emphasis added), but Willie's chapter asserts that "Willie is Willie" (5). Rose demonstrates a preoccupation with the fact that she is only one of many little girls named Rose when she wonders "which little girl named Rose" she is (Stein, *World 3*.) Willie does not experience a similar self-doubt. He is not one of many Willies, but simply Willie. His songs further demonstrate self-assuredness and self-knowledge. Willie declares, "My name is Willie I am not like Rose / I would be Willie whatever arose, / I would be Willie if Henry was my name / I would

be Willie always Willie all the same” (Stein, *World* 7). He later reinforces his confidence in his self-knowledge, asserting “Believe me because I tell you so / When I know yes when I know / Then I am Willie and Willie oh / Oh Willie needs Willie to tell them so” (15). Willie declares that he is Willie when he knows, perhaps echoing the famous philosophical proposition of Renee Descartes, “cogito ergo sum [I think therefore I am].” The narrator later supports these claims of self-knowledge, stating “he knew who / Who was Willie / He was Willie / All through” (Stein, *World* 13). By all accounts, Willie’s identity is self-determined.

Willie does not seem to experience Rose’s anxieties about identity, even drawing a direct contrast between himself and his cousin. The narrator reiterates this contrast, declaring, “Willie was not like his cousin Rose” (Stein, *World* 7). Gyax notes that Willie does not worry about his name or “assume any connection between name and identity” (126) and argues that because of this, “Willie, linguistically at least, is much more self-assured than Rose” (127). Schwenger similarly remarks on Willie’s “apparent lack of concern” about these issues (118), and Hoffeld observes that “Willie has no problems with *his* identity—his very name...indicates a wholeness, a self-knowledge, and concentrated force” (51). For each of these critics, Willie’s confident self-assertion serves as a foil to Rose’s anxieties about her identity. Where her identity seems to be defined by external factors, like her name, his identity comes from within.

While I agree with these critics about the way Willie’s self-assurance serves as a foil to Rose’s insecurities, I believe Stein uses the process of self-identification in these two characters to point to a larger social problem with gender constructs. Gyax and Schwenger do not explore the potential causes of these radically different ideas of the

self, and Hoffeld makes only a passing reference to a potential link between gender and self-identification. Given the emphasis that Stein places on the contrasting between these two characters and their self-concepts, I would argue that Rose has more difficulty with self-identification because she is a girl. The centrality of the gender distinction is clear from the naming of the characters. Rose shares her moniker with a delicate flower, a yonic symbol. Willie's name doubles as a euphemism for male genitalia, as well as carrying the implication of a strong "will." Rose wishes to make her own way and to reach her own conclusions about the world, but because she is a female, her resolve and agency conflict with society's expectations for her gender. Notably, she shares her name with the princess of "Sleeping Beauty," a fairy tale character defined by her passivity. Rose's struggle for a stable self-concept is more difficult than Willie's because her gender and her name threaten her understanding of herself as an active agent. Thus, Stein points to gender as another factor in a child's development that Piaget overlooks. Stein suggests that a child's development is shaped by many external factors that may conflict with Piaget's stages.

Willie is unbothered by the things that disturb Rose; external realities do not threaten his sense of self because his gender affords him power over his surroundings. Gyax explains that while "Rose's [identity] is in process, searching and always calling into question the relation between name and person," Willie's identity "is a less complex, less challenging notion of self" (129). Willie knows that his identity is not dependent on his name, and he is confident in his ability to "do as [he] please[s]" (Stein, *World* 16). Willie believes that neither his identity nor his actions are controlled by external forces. He sings songs that suggest his power and control over those around him, such as "Bring

me bread / Bring me butter..." (15). Unlike Rose, his singing does not make him cry, "it just made him more and more excited" (7) and sometimes incites him into action. In one song, he asserts "I do as I please / I Willie / Willie I I do as I please/ Run around the world just as I please. / I Willie" (16). Where Rose is threatened by the world's roundness, Willie asserts his desire to "run around the world" (16). His declaration demonstrates his belief in his own agency and power over his environment. Stein emphasizes these beliefs through the repetition of the phrases "I do" and "as I please." Beyond the homophonic associations of his name as a marker of his strong will, the repetition of the personal pronoun "I" further emphasizes his secure sense of self.

Whenever something does occasionally upset him or threaten Willie's peace of mind, he eliminates the threat. Willie briefly experiences psychological anxieties similar to Rose's when his father buys him a lion. Though he is initially excited about owning a wild animal, it leads to a series of reflections that causes him to cry, "just like [his] cousin Rose" (19). Willie begins to experience a similar kind of existential crisis, and the narrator observes that "he almost was not Willie" (20). Unlike Rose, however, Willie is able to remove the threat to his identity easily. He immediately decides to get rid of the lion by pawning it off on Rose. Rather than being acted upon, he takes action to ensure that nothing can compromise his stable sense of self. He imposes his will to restore his sense of peace. For the remainder of the narrative, Willie returns to his happy and confident state. He is able to quickly resolve his conflict through his own actions. The radical difference between Willie's stable self-concept and Rose's constant searching for stability point to the tremendous influence that gender can have on psychosocial development.

Quest Narrative

Rose also attempts to take action to combat her uncertainty, but because of the internal conflicts between her name, her gender, and her sense of self, she cannot resolve her issues as easily as Willie can. Lacking a secure self-concept, she cannot simply use the power of her will to eliminate any threats to her peace of mind. Instead, Rose must undertake a physical quest. Will argues that Rose's need for action results from her inability to "subordinat[e] lived experience to abstract knowledge" (341). According to Will, Rose cannot accept the master narrative that tells her the world is round because of her reliance on physical experiences for knowledge. While this theory would fit within the context of Piaget's developmental stages, Rose has already demonstrated an ability to engage with abstract thinking by recognizing the arbitrary nature of the link between signifier and signified. I would argue instead that Rose seeks an active solution to her internal conflict because she wishes to confirm her agency. As a female, she needs to actively express her mastery over her environment to prove that she has control over her own destiny.

Rose appropriates the traditionally masculine quest narrative as a means of composing her own narrative of selfhood. To escape the round world, she decides to climb a nearby mountain so that she "will be there" and "would see everywhere" (Stein 33). She turns her metaphorical quest for a stable self-concept into a literal journey—a "quest to find some place of stability, some 'there' that is truly there and not an illusion of thereness" (Will 341). Rose wants to escape from the roundness and perpetual motion of the world. She chooses a mountain as the site of her quest because she believes that "the mountains...could stop anything" (Stein, *World* 12) and because they appear to be

blue “and blue was her favorite color” (31). She takes comfort in their reassuring presence and their perceived immovability and permanence, so she makes a plan to climb one with her blue chair and to sit in the meadow at the very peak of the mountain. Refusing to accept the definitions that others wish to impose, Rose begins a feminist quest for self-understanding.

Rose’s desire to ascend to a position of knowledge and mastery over her environment hinges upon a need for perspective. The narrator explains Rose’s plan, stating that “she would sit there and yes she did care yes there she would put a chair there there and everywhere she would see everywhere and she would sit on that chair, yes there” (Stein, *World* 33). The repetition and rhyming of the word “there” demonstrate its relative importance within the narrative. Martha Dana Rust argues that “Rose’s longing to be ‘there’ springs not only from her wish to arrive at a stable place in her round world but also from an existential homesickness for an end point, a point...that will constitute the boundary of her own individual story” (n. pag.). Rose wants to find a place where she can achieve some sense of stability. She believes that she will find it on the top of the mountain, where she will be able to “see everywhere” (Stein, *World* 33). Once she is “there,” she will have the perspective needed to disprove her teachers’ claims and ease her anxieties.

Rose plans her quest in the hope that it will bring her both emotional and psychological stability. When she declares her intention to climb the mountain and “be there” (33) her eyes once again fill with tears, but these tears seem to be different from the ones that she cries when she sings. There is no indication of sorrow or distress in this passage; these tears, unlike the others, seem to suggest the kind of personal insight that

Hoffeld believes to be present each time Rose cries. Where the other crying seems indicative of distress, these tears—both preceded and followed by Rose’s declaration of her intended quest—seem to suggest a sense of hope or spiritual enlightenment. The observation that “tears came to her eyes” is sandwiched between the echoing phrases “mountain yes I will be there” and “Yes mountain...yes I will be there” (33). This moment marks the first time in the narrative that Rose is entirely certain of anything; her confidence in her proposed action shifts the tone of the narrative. The remainder of the story follows Rose on her quest and observes her growing self-confidence. She can temporarily ignore the problem of her identity for the duration of her quest, perhaps supporting Stein’s claim that “one has no identity when one is in the act of doing anything” (“Masterpieces,” 309). As long as Rose takes action, she can set aside her anxieties about her identity. Though she is sometimes fearful and sometimes weary, she continues on her way until she reaches her goal.

Rose’s belief that she can achieve a better understanding of self and of her place in the world through a physical quest presumably grows out of a popular trend in children’s literature of the time—the adventure story. Primarily marketed towards male readers, adventure stories were extremely popular in the early twentieth century with both male and female readers. Though earlier adventure stories typically featured a male protagonist, Judy Simons explains that “the rigidity of gender roles became more relaxed in children’s fiction” in the decades following World War I (151). Adventures and quests featuring female protagonists became increasingly popular in the aftermath of the war. Simons interprets this trend in terms of the rigidity of women’s roles in post-war culture. She describes such texts as “fantasies of female autonomy, most popular in an age when

traditional models of femininity were being re-imposed” (152). Stories such as the ever popular *Nancy Drew* series (beginning in 1930), *Pippi Longstocking* (1945), and *Swallows and Amazons* (1930), along with E. Nesbit’s fantasy adventures, all presented lively female characters who actively participated in their own adventures.

Rose believes that she can resolve her anxieties through completion of a quest, perhaps because literature has taught her to trust in the conventions of this genre. In a traditional quest, following the pattern outlined by Joseph Campbell, the (typically male) hero faces many obstacles and challenges, but he overcomes them. Beginning in the “ordinary world,” the hero receives a call to action via a direct threat to his way of life. He has doubts and fears about his ability to succeed and often receives guidance or a gift from a mentor, who gives him the courage to continue. The hero leaves home to begin his quest, and along his way he encounters obstacles that test his abilities. He prepares to face his greatest challenge in the stage commonly referred to as the “approach to the inmost cave,” and must face this terrible danger or inner crisis in the “supreme ordeal.” The hero ultimately overcomes this greatest challenge and receives the power or insight necessary to complete his journey. Campbell’s structure then continues with the road back home, a final battle and/or resurrection, and the return to the ordinary world, wherein the hero comes back wiser with a solution or new perspective that serves as a final reward.

While Rose’s journey follows this pattern in many ways, her quest does not provide her with the fresh perspective or greater understanding that she desires. Rose begins in the ordinary world, where her way of life is threatened by her teacher’s assertion that the world is round. She prepares to set out on her quest and experiences

doubts about the difficulty of her journey and her ability to succeed. Though she does not have a mentor, she equips herself for her journey with the blue chair that she believes will help her to accomplish her goal. She encounters many obstacles and difficulties, and she faces the biggest threat after entering a literal cave, wherein she confronts “evil” in the form of terrifying graffiti. Rose overcomes this fear through action—by carving an assertion of selfhood into a tree. This experience gives her the courage to proceed, and she reaches the summit. However, this is where Rose’s journey ends. She does not receive a final reward, and she does not return home with a solution to her crisis. In this respect, though she overcomes each obstacle she faces, Rose’s quest is unsuccessful. Her problem cannot be solved through heroic action.

Stein exposes the generic lie that suggests internal struggles can be easily resolved through external action by undermining the importance of the quest. Rose’s quest does not resolve her anxieties, but rather creates new questions and uncertainties. Upon reaching the summit, Rose ultimately discovers that her real destination is unreachable. Longing to be “there,” she soon discovers that such a goal is ultimately impossible. Once one arrives “there,” “there” is no longer “there,” but here. Her desire to be “there” demonstrates a longing that can never be fulfilled, while simultaneously highlighting the idiosyncrasies of the English language. “There” is a destination defined by its opposition to “here.” So long as the speaking subject is anywhere, that place becomes “here.” Thus, Rose’s desire to be “there” is a desire to escape her surroundings—to be somewhere different from where she is now. In essence then, in wanting to be “there,” she is expressing a desire to escape from the familiar and, possibly, to escape from herself. She fulfills her physical quest, only to realize that her spiritual quest can never be fulfilled.

Dangers within the Arcadian World

As with her use of the conventions of the quest narrative and of developmental theory, Stein similarly invokes and undermines the conventions of Arcadian children's literature. Roni Natov explains that "the green world in the literature of childhood is a response to the worldliness of the world" and "offers a natural critique of civilization" (91). Stein's text initially fits into this paradigm. Rose's anxieties develop as a result of her schooling. Though a child's socialization into adult culture begins from the moment of its arrival, the beginning of formal education is often regarded as the beginning of one's formal socialization into adult civilization. For Rose, education seems to mark a break from the natural world and an initiation into adulthood. Consequently, Rose believes she can escape her problems by immersing herself in nature. Her journey up the mountain can, in this way, be read as an attempt to escape the problems of society by retreating into the natural world. Natov reads this as Rose's attempt "to move into nature, away from the repressive forces of civilization into the pastoral where one finds both fears and joy in wilderness" (108). Thus far, Stein's story seems to fit into the pastoral mode, suggesting that the natural world is a safe and reassuring place where children can find inner peace and be at harmony with nature.

Once Rose begins her journey, however, Stein shatters that illusion. She exposes the dangers and threats within the natural world and demonstrates that the Arcadian idyll is merely a myth. Ingrid G. Daemmrich explains that the connections between the natural world and paradise have become a "single motif" in literature that integrates the traditions of Arcadia, Elysium, Eden, Heaven, and the Golden Age. She describes this motif as "instantly recognizable through such common features as green trees and grass,

gentle hills or steep mountains, colorful flowers, pure water, blue skies, balmy breezes, proximity to the divinity/divinities, joy, peace, harmony, and freedom from fear, work, strife, want, disease, and death” (213-214). Rose immerses herself in a world full of greenery, waterfalls, mountains, and streams in order to find peace; however, Stein undermines the motif by emphasizing the struggles, fears, and strife that Rose must face within the natural world.

During her journey up the mountain, for example, Rose faces many obstacles. As she sets out on her quest, the narrator observes, “It was not a trip she had to grip the blue chair and sometimes it hung by a hair” (Stein, *World* 36), thus suggesting that Rose’s journey was not pleasurable, but extremely difficult. The narrator also makes a veiled reference in this section to an unidentified threat, indicating “so great had been Rose’s scare” (36). Before providing any specifics of Rose’s expedition, Stein already informs readers that her journey was both difficult and frightening. In the next chapter, the narrator describes Rose’s state of mind as she sets out on her journey, noting that “nobody does like to go” and explaining that “it was a very long way to go even if a mountain does not grow even so, climb a mountain and you will know even if there is no snow” (37). Rather than regarding her quest optimistically or believing her sojourn into nature will be pleasurable, Rose focuses on the challenges and difficulties she will face. She does not subscribe to the Arcadian myth.

The negative tone that marks Rose’s initial foray into nature persists throughout much of her journey up the mountain. Rather than hearing birds chirping or singing, Rose hears “some birds making funny screams” (Stein, *World* 37). She reflects on her loneliness and isolation, and every sound is a potential cause of “alarms” (38). The

narrator observes, “there was a simple noise just a noise and with a noise there were eyes and with the eyes there was a tail and then from Rose there was a wail” (38). Rather than feeling at peace, Rose feels unsettled and somewhat panicked in the natural world. Her encounters with wild animals are not pleasant or spiritual, but frightening. Her journey is difficult and overwhelming; she notes “how little she could move just a little and a little” (39) and reflects that “a mountain is so much harder than a hill and still” (41). She is frightened, tired, hot, and “sticking” (39). Rose believes that “everything helped to hold her back” (39), but she feels that she must keep going to reach her goal.

Rose encounters several unsettling things in the natural world. She sees something that she will not name in the section “Rose Saw It Close,” and is so frightened by the experience that “she never can tell...what she saw when she fell” (Stein, *World* 45). She tries to reassure herself that “it was alright of course it was alright it was just night, that is all it was just at night” (45), but her fear impels her to keep moving. Almost every sight and sound in the natural world startles her, and Rose’s state of constant fear and anxiety becomes overwhelming when she discovers the word “Devil” written three times in a little cave behind a waterfall. The discovery is so traumatic that “[Rose] never could go down not there not ever again there, she could never go anywhere where water is falling and water does fall even out of a faucet” (48). Rose went behind the waterfall expecting to find a place of natural wonder, where she could sit and rest and find a moment of peace. Instead, she finds a terrifying declaration of evil and corruption.

Stein directly contradicts the popular image of nature as Eden by reminding readers that such a paradise is impossible because of human corruption. Rose’s reaction to the graffiti emphasizes the fact that a person must have stood on a chair like hers to

write “*Devil, Devil, Devil*” on the rock. Stein symbolically reenacts the fall of humanity through this linguistic insertion of evil into an idyllic setting. Rather than presenting the view of nature as Edenic paradise, popular in texts such as Francis Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* or Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*, Stein chooses to represent a post-fall Eden. Her representation of the natural world is not idyllic but realistic, frightening, and ominous.

Linguistic Self-Assertion and Its Limitations

In a failed attempt to distract herself from the traumatic experience, Rose reflects on the omnipresent roundness that threatens her, ultimately coming to the horrifying revelation that the roundness she seeks to escape is a part of her name and thus a part of her own identity: “there was only Rose, Rose, Rose, Rose and all of a sudden Rose knew that in Rose there was an o and an o is round, oh dear not a sound” (48). Overcome by loneliness and fear and unwilling to sing since it will inevitably lead to crying, Rose decides that she “had to do something” (52) to assuage her insecurities. She decides to carve “Rose is a Rose is a Rose is a Rose” all the way around a tree, as high as she can reach (52), mirroring the actions of the “devil” carver, but reappropriating the traumatic episode into a declaration of selfhood. Most critics who believe that Rose achieves self-acceptance regard this as the moment of her self-assertion. Schwenger asserts that the carving “may represent Rose’s acceptance of the roundness that is part of her evanescent identity” (119). Reynolds insists that this is the moment when “she finally declares herself ‘Rose’” and “her stable identity, achieved through considerable effort and at a cost...is given form” (*Radical* 29). Gygas similarly argues that this moment “illustrates the importance of naming oneself” and that “Rose demonstrates strength, triumph, and

self-assertion” through this action (127). While some scholars, like Rust, believe that Rose’s struggle “for a secure sense of self” is ultimately unsuccessful as she is never able “to penetrate [her] existential dilemma” (n. pag.), most still regard this moment of linguistic self-assertion as a step towards self-acceptance.

I would argue that this action does not resolve Rose’s crisis of identity, but rather provides her with a momentary relief from her trouble. Carving her name does not actually answer any of her questions about who she is or about her relation to the world; it merely serves as a temporary distraction from her existential angst. Regarding Rose’s action as proof of her stable identity overlooks Stein’s own assertion that identity ceases to exist “when one is in the act of doing anything” (“Masterpieces” 309). With this statement in mind, Rose’s action seems to me a way of escaping her identity struggle rather than resolving it. Through the act of carving her name, Rose is temporarily able to disregard her surroundings and to focus entirely on her act of self-declaration: “And Rose forgot the dawn forgot the rosy dawn forgot the sun forgot she was only one and all alone there” (Stein, *World* 53). As long as she focuses on the task at hand, Rose can ignore everything else, and she no longer feels afraid or alone. This is not, however, the end of her journey, nor is it her most significant moment of self-assertion. Rose carves her name, as Willie has done before her on another tree nearby, but this action is only reassuring enough to enable her to continue on her quest. She has not yet reached her goal, and although this episode gives her the strength to do so, her difficulties are not over. She continues to struggle and to feel lonely, but she now “had courage” (58) to finish her climb.

Even the conclusion of her quest does not actually assuage Rose's anxieties. Rose finally reaches "There" (Stein, *World* 61) and is able to sit on her chair on the very top of the mountain. This moment marks the pinnacle of her journey of self-discovery; however, it does not mark the end of her narrative. She reaches her physical goal and experiences a moment of self-knowledge and temporary security. Having remained silent for her entire climb because she thought the sound of her own voice would frighten her, Rose is now able to sing a song about her accomplishments and her satisfaction at reaching her goal. She offers a clear articulation of selfhood akin to Willie's earlier song: "I am Rose my eyes are blue / I am Rose and who are you / I am Rose and when I sing / I am Rose like anything" (63). This song asserts a stable self-concept; she does not question the circumstances that enable her to be Rose, she simply declares that she is Rose. This new song, Gygas argues, "expresses self-confidence and reflects acceptance of her name" (128). Reynolds suggests that these lines "stake [Rose's] claim to self-knowledge" and challenge others to follow her lead (*Radical* 29-30). For a few moments, Rose is able to bask in the glow of her success, sitting on her chair and reassuring herself that "she really was up there. She really was" (Stein, *World* 63). But, her self-confidence and self-knowledge do not endure for long. She may be somewhat more confident in her linguistic authority, but this confidence does not assuage her fears or resolve her anxieties. Her psychological quest does not end with the conclusion of her physical one.

Rose's journey helps her to understand more about herself, but it does not resolve her uncertainties about her place in the world. Moments after her powerful self-declaration, Rose succumbs to her fears and dissolves into tears. Her insecurities begin to creep in almost immediately. Her song begins with an expression of her contentment:

“When I wish a little wish / I wish that I was where I am” (61), but then quickly reverts back to the confusion and uncertainty that characterized her entire journey and wonders “Am I asleep or am I awake / ... / Am I here or am I there” (62). Her “I am Rose” pronouncements continue with the recognition that “I am Rose but I am not rosy/ All alone and not very cosy” (Stein, *World* 63). She is more secure in her understanding of who she is, but this security does not make her feel any less lonely or afraid. She knows she is Rose, but that knowledge is not sufficient.

Rose reaches her intended destination and is finally “there,” but she is no longer certain about where “there” is. She cries, “I am here and here is there...oh where where where is there. I am there oh yes I am there oh where oh where is there” (63). Rose now begins to realize that her destination was unreachable. She can never be “there”; she can only ever be “here,” and “here” is the place of anxiety and uncertainty where she began her journey. She laments, “oh dear oh dear I never did know I would be here, and here I am all alone all night and I am in a most awful fright” (64). Rust suggests that “once Rose reaches the mountaintop, the pristine certainty of being there loses significance” (n. pag.). The reappearance of Rose’s uncertainty is due to her disillusionment. Believing that climbing the mountain will resolve her personal struggle, she represses her concerns for the duration of her climb. As long as she has a goal, she is able to keep moving forward, but once she reaches that goal, her unease overcomes her once again. The mountain is ultimately unable to halt the threatening roundness she seeks to escape and on its summit she makes the startling discovery that “It was darker and darker and the world was rounder and rounder” (63).

Rose's story does not follow the traditional linear progression from problem to resolution, but rather cycles back from crisis to temporary respite and back to crisis. In resisting the conventional closure expected from a quest narrative, Stein suggests that children's literature is dishonest in teaching children that existential quandaries can be so easily resolved. Instead, Stein teaches children to accept uncertainty and confusion as inevitable parts of life. Rose undertakes her journey, faces many obstacles, and is ultimately triumphant in her physical quest, but she does not find the answers she seeks. Beyond merely resisting genre conventions, Cleveland argues that the unhappy conclusion of Rose's quest actually demonstrates Stein's rejection of "the nostalgic notion of a childhood innocence which could restore us to happiness if only we could get back there, since 'there' becomes 'here' and therefore impossible" (120-21). Rather than falling prey to the nostalgic vision of a childhood where innocence reigns, all difficulties are miraculously overcome, and every conflict is resolved by the end of the narrative, Stein acknowledges that such a vision is false. Psychological conflicts are not so easily resolved, and real life is far messier and more confusing than many children's texts are willing to acknowledge. Because Rose is still "a little girl" and a Rose, her successful adventure does not resolve her identity crisis. She still experiences the internal conflict between society's expectations for girls and her own sense of who she is.

In his critical history of American children's literature, Leonard Marcus addresses the "legacy of disillusionment forged by World War I" and its effect on children's literature (107). Marcus describes how authors responded to the war by rejecting "Victorian sentiment" and narrative conventions in favor of brutal honesty. Deeming these impulses unfit for children's literature, Marcus argues that the psychological effects

of the war created an “all but unbridgeable...gap between the nation’s leading literary writers and its authors for children” (107). Stein and other modernist children’s authors disprove this claim and bridge the gap by directly engaging with the disillusionment that defines the modernist era in their children’s books. Like the soldiers who went off to war believing they could save democracy but later questioned what they were really fighting for, Rose experiences a similar kind of disillusionment with a mission in which she had complete faith. Rose undertakes her journey with complete confidence that it will resolve her anxieties and provide the answers to her questions about herself and her place in the world, but upon the completion of her goal, she realizes that her quest was misguided. Her journey up the mountaintop does not actually resolve her internal struggle, it only serves as a distraction from it.

Ultimately, Stein suggests that Rose is incapable of self-definition and must rely on a man to define her. Rose’s anxieties are only alleviated through the sudden appearance of Willie on another hill. Willie arrives at the moment when Rose is overwhelmed by fear and his searchlight, which “went round and round...all around Rose” makes Rose feel warm and safe, despite its roundness (Stein, *World* 65). Schwenger finds this resolution problematic since Rose is only able “to achieve selfhood” through dependence “upon another self” (120). In this respect, Rose’s identity depends on recognition by another, circling back to Stein’s famous declaration that “I am I because my little dog knows me” (“Masterpieces” 309).

Through her journey to the mountaintop, Rose undertakes a metaphorical quest in search of a stable identity or self-concept, but despite the success of her physical journey, her spiritual quest is ultimately unsuccessful. At the story’s end, Rose is still not secure

in her own identity. Her sense of stability is dependent upon her relationship to a male, Willie. Although Rose tries to convince herself that she “did not want Willie” (Stein, *World* 45) during her trek up the mountain, his timely arrival gives her comfort and a sense of security that she does not have when she is alone. This problematic resolution of Rose’s identity crisis reflects a disturbing trend in children’s fiction in which female characters are dependent on males for their status and security.

Use and Subversion of Fairytale Conventions

Stein further undercuts Rose’s attempts at self-assertion through her use of the marriage plot. While many critics view the implementation of this plot device as a failing on Stein's part, I argue that Stein imposes it in order to challenge the inherent sexism and artificial closure of fairy tale conventions. Not only does Willie arrive to rescue Rose, but Stein also includes a *deus ex machina* device wherein the two children end up not being related after all and are thus able to marry and have children of their own. The narrator offers no explanation for this bizarre turn of events and simply notes “Willie and Rose turned out not to be cousins, just how nobody knows” (Stein, *World* 67). Rust sees this refusal to address the mystery as undercutting the story’s overly convenient traditional closing. She argues, “Because Stein passes lightly over the mystery of this sudden change in Willie’s identity, her narrative sleight of hand flies in the face of the conservative standard of ‘truth’ we expect from narrative even as it seems to provide the tidy closure we expect from a story for children” (n. pag.). In declining to explain the sudden alteration in these characters’ relationship, Stein highlights the absurdity of this resolution. Furthermore, the “abrupt alteration in Willie’s identity” (Rust), problematizes

the very concept of a stable identity. If Rose's cousin Willie can suddenly turn out not be Rose's cousin, then any other identity could shift just as suddenly.

The final lines of Stein's text, like her opening lines, play with and complicate the traditional conventions of children's stories. Stein's text begins with "once upon a time" (1) and concludes with "they lived happily ever after" (67), but what exists between the two phrases may not be easily recognizable as a children's story. Borrowing Peter Hunt's term, Rust argues that these "oral discourse markers" within the text "emerge as a sort of life-line" for the readers, to "remind us that in spite of the unconventional syntax, we are listening to a story. And if we are listening to a story we may be certain that a narrator is in control and that she will arrange things in some kind of linear, sequential order" (n. pag.). Rust's claims seem to be vindicated by Stein's use of an essentially linear plot with a seemingly conventional ending. Stein certainly does seem to be using these devices and discourse markers to position her text within the established genre; however, her use of them in the context of the narrative becomes subversive.⁵

Stein's "once upon a time" is not followed by anything that would situate the text in terms of history or cultural context or provide a clear narrative framework. Her story begins: "Once upon a time the world was round and you could go on it around and around. Everywhere there was somewhere and everywhere there were men women children dogs cows wild pigs little rabbits cats lizards and animals" (Stein, *World* 1-2). Her conventional opening is immediately undercut by an unconventional use of language and narrative. Rather than beginning with some sort of clear expository material, she begins with the premise of circularity. She ends with the same premise, bringing the

⁵ Stein uses a similar technique in "Melanctha" with the seemingly conventional death of the "fallen woman." In this narrative, the seemingly disjunctive resolution calls attention to the artificiality of another cultural narrative of gender.

story full circle. Not contenting herself with the traditional closing line, she expands it: “and they lived happily ever after and the world just went on being round” (67). The circularity matters more than the details of the particular narrative. Through her arbitrary use of the traditional closing and her final lines regarding the never-ending circularity, Stein actually calls attention to, and arguably offers an implied critique of, the stereotypical gender roles in traditional children’s narratives. The marriage and “happily ever after” do not resolve Rose’s anxieties about the world’s roundness; “the world just went on being round” (67) even after her story ends, suggesting that her journey was unsuccessful and, ultimately, pointless.

The conclusion of *The World is Round* is so seemingly random that it almost begs to be read ironically. Critics often see the reappearance of Willie and all that follows as Stein’s attempt to conform to genre expectations by providing a traditional resolution. Gygax complains that “the ending is disconcerting after Rose’s emancipatory climb all by herself and without Willie’s help” and concludes that “it seems as if Stein made concessions to a conciliatory conclusion for her children’s book” (128). Ardam also views the resolution as an attempt “to bolster [the text’s] children’s-literature credentials” (578), and Will expresses a similar disappointment over Rose’s ultimate submission. Will argues that “for most of the story, Rose can be read as a feminist heroine, a child-rebel who refuses to conform to the adult expectations around her” but that she must ultimately conform to “the master narrative of heterosexual pairing and normative family life” (342). Linda S. Watts also sees this resolution as a nod towards convention, declaring that “the tale cannot end with a victorious and enthroned woman bathed in light...For the sake of story closure, the wild Rose must be tamed” (n. pag.). Rather than

regarding the ending as some sort of failing or concession on Stein's part, I would argue that the ending could be read as an attempt to challenge the very conventions Stein's text seems to uphold. The text foregrounds a young girl's struggle for self-empowerment. Because of this, Stein's decision to end Rose's search by imposing the marriage plot serves as a mocking critique of society's expectations for women.

The World is Round seems to actively engage with gender constructs by setting up a contrast between Willie's easy, confident self-assurance and Rose's struggle to achieve a sense of identity that is not dependent on external realities. Stein suggests that self-assertion is fundamentally more difficult for a girl than it is for a boy. The stories of Willie and Rose reflect Charlotte Perkins Gilman's critiques about gender construction in early childhood. In *Women and Economics*, Gilman argues that gender distinctions are socially conditioned from birth. She writes, "To the boy we say, 'Do'; to the girl, 'Don't.' The little boy must 'take care' of the little girl" (28). Everything about the way that children are raised contributes to their understanding of the sex distinction and of the male's role as protector of the female. The complementary narratives of the two cousins demonstrate the extent to which this ingrained cultural attitude shapes the growing consciousness of children. Rose desires autonomy and self-assertion but she is held back by the cultural perception that "She is a girl, 'only a girl,' 'nothing but a girl'" (Gilman 29). Though she attempts to overcome the limitations of her gendered self by climbing the mountain alone and inscribing her name on the landscape, she must eventually succumb to the dominant ideology. Willie must rescue and "take care' of the little girl," (Gilman 28) who is ultimately unable to transcend the cultural expectations of her gender.

Reread in light of this engagement with gender, the conclusion seems even more peculiar. Stein's decision to revoke Rose's short-lived independence and to arbitrarily marry her off to her no-longer-cousin, Willie, incites outrage in some readers and confusion in others. Most importantly, though, it provokes discussion. It is virtually impossible to engage critically with this text without addressing the subject of gender and the marriage plot because of the unexpected twist with which Stein chooses to close her tale. By first creating a story in which the young female protagonist journeys toward independence and self-discovery and then abruptly re-inscribing traditional gender roles, Stein underscores the arbitrary nature of this conventional plot device. Attaching the "so they married and had children...and they lived happily ever after" (Stein, *World* 67) closing to a story where it does not seem to belong, Stein calls the very nature of this ending into question. Her readers must consider why such an ending is considered to be a conventional closing for children's texts. Rather than assuming that Stein "made concessions" (Gygax 128) to the genre of children's literature, readers should instead question why this is the expected closure for the genre. Stein creates a text that defies genre expectations at every turn, and then tacks on a conventional ending in order to challenge the assumptions that make such an ending inevitable. She gives her readers a conventional happy ending, but makes it so unconvincing and unpleasant that they cannot take pleasure in it uncritically.

Rose's retreat from self-assertion to comfortable domesticity demonstrates how much easier it is to accept society's established gender roles and to find one's place within the established narratives. Throughout the narrative, Rose is an active figure who struggles to find her place in the round world. She will not accept the things that her

teachers tell her unless she can confirm their truth through her own experience. She wrestles with questions of identity and selfhood with which Stein herself engaged in many of her essays. Ultimately, however, the struggle proves too difficult for the young girl. Upon achieving the goal she has set for herself, she feels a momentary sense of self-assurance and stability, but she is quickly overcome by the anxieties that have plagued her throughout her journey. Realizing that her attempt to resolve her existential plight through action has failed, she quickly accedes to the only available alternative – the master narrative and its insistence on the marriage plot. Reverting to the passive role of “damsel-in-distress,” Rose must be “rescued” by Willie before they can marry and live “happily ever after.”

Through her seemingly arbitrary use of the conventional closure, Stein offers an implied critique of both the traditional gender roles in children’s literature and the genre’s expectation of a tidy resolution. As a major figure in the modernist movement, Stein is naturally suspicious of overly neat endings. Stein highlights the importance of circularity or “beginning again and again” in her essay “Composition as Explanation,” where she also outlines her theory of the continuous present (518). Interpreting Stein’s use of the continuous present, Wendell Wilcox explains, “It led her to say that there is no beginning and no ending, not really. There is only the middle. Something is always going on...beginning and ending are the really difficult things because after all they are things that in reality are not” (199). Stein’s text rejects closure in favor of circularity – emphasizing the continuation of the questions and problems that have persisted throughout Rose’s narrative.

The artificial sense of closure that characterizes much of children's literature provides a false sense of security that does not effectively prepare child readers for a world that is messy, complicated, and rarely stable. Stein undercuts the very nature of her "happily ever after" by reaffirming that "the world just went on being round" (Stein, *World* 67)—the problems that have plagued Rose throughout the narrative are not resolved by her marriage. The kinds of conflicts and anxieties that Stein's narrative explores do not have easy solutions; they are problems with which adults and children alike must wrestle. Because of this, a simple solution would inevitably ring false. By highlighting the arbitrary nature of the conventional closure, Stein challenges the idea that stories for children should offer a "happily ever after." Rather, Stein suggests there may be value in raising questions without answering them, thus allowing space for readers to reach their own conclusions or solutions.

In her children's book, Stein manages to engage a wide audience without compromising her characteristically complex style or her commitment to social issues. She balances the expectations of the genre with her desire to explore gender dynamics and child psychology (and their intersection) in a completely revolutionary way. Just as she resists the rules of standard writing in her poetry and novels, Stein refuses to follow the conventions of the children's literature genre or to uncritically accept the precepts of developmental psychology. Though she gestures towards custom with her use of "once upon a time" and "they lived happily ever after," Stein ultimately resists the linear narrative and comforting closure that is most often associated with children's literature, just as she resists the notion that all children think and act the same way. She uses recognizable phrases and conventions only to undermine their intent by subverting the

comfortable narrative that they are meant to convey. She invokes the genres of Arcadian fiction and adventure quests, but breaks the molds and resists the tidy solutions these genres offer. Rose's personal journey ends without resolving her internal conflict, and the world continues to be round. In emphasizing the complexity and circularity of the struggle for self-affirmation, Stein demonstrates a modernist disillusionment with the overly simple answers of the past. She engages directly with the complexities of modern life and teaches young readers to accept that confusion and uncertainty are an inevitable part of life.

Chapter Three:

“Truth is Best,” But What Is Truth?

J.M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy*

J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* is perhaps one of the most frequent subjects of literary criticism in all of children’s literature. No essay collection about the Golden Age or classic texts of children’s literature would be complete without a chapter on Barrie. The many different film adaptations of both *Peter Pan* and J.M. Barrie’s life story, and the recent centennial celebration of the play have further fueled this critical interest. But the attention Barrie and his play receive is not always positive. Many critics seem preoccupied with interpreting *Peter Pan* in a kind of vacuum. Scholars discuss the different *Peter Pan* texts solely in relation to one another, to other critics of those texts, and in the context of the unusual, and admittedly mesmerizing, details of Barrie’s personal life⁶.

The vast majority of essays about *Peter Pan* include several of the following elements: discussion of his early childhood trauma and the death of his brother (“the boy who would never grow up”), stories of his youthful desire to emulate his dead brother and lessen his mother’s grief, exploration of his close relationship with his mother (and a suggestion that this extreme closeness stunted his development), speculation about the nature of his relationship with Sylvia Llewellyn Davies and her sons (either a suggestion of pedophilia or a staunch denial of that potential reading of the relationship), details of his unconsummated marriage and possible impotence, reference to his small stature (as evidence of his stunted development), and suppositions about his relationship with his

⁶ The work of Humphrey Carpenter, Marjorie Garber, Jackie Wullschläger, Martin Green, John Griffith, Michael Egan, Peter Hollindale, Marietta Karpe, Penelope Schott Starkey, and others attempts to understand elements of the story in light of Barrie’s personal history.

father. These essays are usually, at least in part, based in biographical and psychoanalytical criticism. Often, Barrie criticism tends to be hermetic; scholars focus narrowly on the *Peter Pan* texts and their author. If Barrie and his work are contextualized at all, it is only as a Golden Age children's author and as another example of the cloying sentimentality and escapism of Golden Age children's literature.

I seek to provide a new way of contextualizing Barrie and his work by recasting him as a part of community of modernists who were experimenting with infusing more ambiguity into their narratives and moving away from the notion of a singular and objective "truth." Barrie was not producing his work in a vacuum, nor was he solely known for the phenomenon that was *Peter Pan*. Rather, Barrie was, as Valentina Bold and Andrew Nash assert, "a writer fully immersed in the literary and intellectual culture of his day (viii)." He maintained friendships and correspondences with modernist figures like D.H. Lawrence and Ford Madox Ford and with other authors, like A.A. Milne and Rudyard Kipling, who similarly experimented with infusing modernist techniques and ambiguity into children's literature. These authors all demonstrate a deep skepticism about the notion of a stable truth, whether they are writing for children or for adults.

Barrie and other modernist children's author imbue their works with a high level of modernist indeterminacy. R.D.S. Jack explores Barrie's relationships with and "enthusiasm for" other modernist authors, like Henrik Ibsen, Henri Bergson, and August Strindberg, and argues that his appreciation of such works "indicates his acceptance of the 'uncertainty principle' underlying modernism" ("*Barrie's Later Dramas*" 30). This is a principle that Barrie and other modernist children's authors enact in much of their own work. Rather than providing their readers with easy answers or telling them how events

should be interpreted, they make use of parody, simultaneity, montage, and notions of the continuous present to create complex narratives that resist simple conclusions. These authors urge their readers to see that the modern world is too complex and chaotic to allow for everything to be sorted into neat singular truths. In *Peter and Wendy*, Barrie provides a series of genuinely contradictory ideas that cannot be reconciled - particularly with respect to social issues, forcing his readers to simultaneously see both sides and refusing to elevate one view over the other.

Too often, critics reference Barrie's texts piecemeal as support for whatever claims they wish to make about Barrie's personal life or the Edwardian cult of the child. Rather than a complex whole, the novel (or the play or the short story) is treated almost as a series of aphorisms—one-liners that can be used to prove or disprove whatever the critics would like to tell us about the author or the era. The text(s) lend themselves to these sorts of contradictory claims because the vision of childhood that Barrie presents within them is a very conflicted one. Children are alternately innocent and cruel; they are not fully immersed in adult culture, but are not entirely free of its influence; eternal childhood is sometimes a dream and sometimes a curse; Neverland is a fantasy or a legitimate lifestyle choice; the island is full of whimsical adventures but also contains the possibility of imminent death; eternal youth is a choice or an inescapable fate; and adults are selfless or self-absorbed depending on the scene. Rather than picking and choosing which claims we agree with, Barrie's text asks readers to accept that these contradictions are inherent in all things. His story embraces ambiguity and trusts readers to sort things out for themselves.

Instead of providing clear answers or suggesting which view is “true,” Barrie presents a complex vision of childhood in relation to adult culture and its ideologies of race, gender, and class. Refusing to choose sides, Barrie foregrounds these contradictions as an inherent part of life, extending this indeterminacy to the very structure of his narrative. Because the text alternately accepts and interrogates these dominant ideologies and the larger ideologies of childhood prevalent in Barrie’s time, the narrator and the narrative itself are constantly in flux. Barrie uses an unreliable and unstable narrator, a nonlinear plot, a blend of disparate generic conventions, parody, a conflicted point of view, and a series of border crossings to illustrate the ambiguities and inconsistencies within contemporary ideologies of childhood, race, gender, and class. By painting Peter as both an ideal child and a selfish brat and by countering suggestions of eternal play, freely chosen, with those of a fated eternal isolation, Barrie captures the tension between the Romantic ideal child and a more modernist awareness of children’s vulnerability, individuality, and psychological complexity.

The reluctance of critics to consider *Peter and Wendy* as a work of children’s literature can be understood, in part, by examining the text’s engagement with literary modernism. Jacqueline Rose, Jack Zipes, and others insist that *Peter and Wendy* is not really a story for children because of its complexity, its experimentation, and its use of parody and sophisticated humor. These traits, regarded as too “advanced” or experimental for child readers, are actually prevalent in many children’s texts of the time, reflecting a wider movement in which many children’s authors, including Lewis Carroll, Edith Nesbit, A.A. Milne, Rudyard Kipling, John Masefield, and Kenneth Grahame, among others, engaged with various aspects of literary modernism. While Rose argues

that children's fiction resisted the influence of literary modernism (*Case*), and David Rudd later adjusts her argument by asserting that "modernism...deliberately distanced itself from what it saw as the restrictive world of children's writing" (300), these modernist children's authors disprove the assumed cultural division. Far from being "restrictive," children's fantasy allows for infinite free play and possibilities unhampered by logic or convention. Barrie's text, alongside other similarly experimental works, proves that children's literature provides fruitful terrain for modernist experiments with language and narrative. Indeed, many children's stories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century embrace the techniques and concerns of modernist literature. Barrie's text is a notable example because his narrative slippages challenge the very boundaries between fantasy and reality, between story and history, and between imaginative fiction and objective truth.

Barrie's novel, *Peter and Wendy*, demonstrates an engagement with literary modernism both through its subject matter and through its literary techniques. *Peter and Wendy* offers a sophisticated exploration of the problems of memory and identity, an innovative use of form, a parody of prevailing representations of race, gender, and nationalism, and an ambiguous narrating figure whose self-conscious attention to the construction of the story disrupts the boundary between fantasy and reality. With Neverland, Barrie creates a liminal space where children can enact the (arguably adult) fantasy of never growing older, but he ultimately shatters this fantasy both by suggesting that only Peter can exist in such a state and by demonstrating that this type of existence is not desirable for anyone. Through the narrator's shifting relations to the characters and events of the story, Barrie suggests that "truth" is itself a relative concept, rather than a

source of stable meaning. In effect, Barrie produces a children's story that is just as experimental and challenging as the works traditionally associated with literary modernism. As Marah Gubar and Karen McGavock have both demonstrated, Barrie ostensibly adheres to the Romantic ideal of the child, while actually challenging that ideal and suggesting that children are both "innocent" and "heartless." For these reasons, Barrie's text, like A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*, seems to suffer the dual burden of being considered too sentimental, cloying, and whimsical for adult appreciation and too complex, cynical, and experimental for children.

Textual History

J.M. Barrie's creation of the Peter Pan myth poses significant challenges for researchers. As Rose points out, the difficulty in determining a "definitive" source text is perhaps the greatest problem of Peter Pan research, because no such text exists (*Case*). Peter Pan was first created as an oral myth—a series of stories J.M. Barrie invented for/with the Llewellyn Davies boys. His first textual appearance was in a picture book that Barrie created solely for the enjoyment of the Llewellyn Davies family, *The Boy Castaways of Lake Island* (1901). Barrie only produced two copies of that text, which included a series of captioned photographs of Barrie and the boys enacting scenes from their stories. There are arguably shades of the Peter Pan character in *Sentimental Tommy* (1896) and *Tommy and Grizel* (1900), but *The Boy Castaways* marks the first clear introduction of Peter Pan in print. This is an important distinction because it shows that Peter Pan, for Barrie, was originally intended for a child audience, as Gubar ("*Peter Pan as Children's Theatre*") and others have already demonstrated.

The indeterminacy that permeates the Peter Pan texts, however, can be traced to these questions of origin. Despite Peter's origin as a tale told for and with the Llewellyn Davies children, Peter Pan's first public appearance was in a series of chapters operating as a nested story within a novel published for adults, *The Little White Bird* (1902). This was followed by the first successful staging of *Peter Pan*, the play, in 1904. The play ran for 24 years before Barrie published the text in 1928. In the intervening decades, Barrie engaged in constant revision—altering, adding, and removing scenes, and repeatedly changing the play's ending. Andrew Birkin notes that Barrie was still adding lines and revising the play during its 16th annual revival in 1920 (289). In between the play's first performance and its publication, however, Barrie published two other versions: *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906), in which Barrie extracted the Peter Pan chapters from *The Little White Bird* and repackaged them for a child audience, and *Peter and Wendy* (1911)⁷, a novelized version of the play, ostensibly published for children but arguably too “advanced” in its narrative techniques and too “adult” in its references and tone for child readers. This chapter will focus on *Peter and Wendy* because it provides the most fertile ground for an examination of modernist techniques and preoccupations in Barrie's work. Other incarnations of Peter will be brought in where necessary to provide additional support.

Narrative Instability

Each of Barrie's different versions of Peter's adventures provides readers with a narrating figure who seems not entirely reliable. In the case of the published play, this

⁷ This novelized version of the tale was later republished as *Peter Pan and Wendy* and again as *Peter Pan*, leading to further confusion in Peter Pan scholarship. For the purposes of this paper, I shall refer to the novel by its original title, *Peter and Wendy*.

figure permeates the substantial stage notes and Barrie's dedication, "To the Five." In both *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *Peter and Wendy*, this figure is in the form of an adult narrator who seems somewhat uncertain about his role or his relation to the narrative. This uncertainty is most pronounced in *Peter and Wendy*, as the narrator asserts the veracity of the tales but also metafictionally reflects on the best way to arrange the events of the story. Although critics often regard the instability of Barrie's narrating figure as a flaw, I argue that he consciously experiments with narration and narrative voice to encourage readers to question the perceived wisdom and authority of adults.

Barrie disrupts readers' expectations and complicates our understanding of "truth" or "the real" by creating a narrating figure that is both unreliable and inconsistent in his relationship to the story, to the characters, and to the readers. Asserting that "truth is best," the narrator vacillates between assertions of his own adherence to historical facts and acknowledgment of his story as construct. This leaves the reader unable to determine what is true. Both the events and the narrator become suspect, and thus Barrie destabilizes the very idea of truth within the narrative.

Rather than acknowledging the modernist indeterminacy within the texts, many critics attribute this narrative instability to the author's own uncertainty of his position. Ann Yeoman argues that "Barrie seems to struggle throughout the novel to decide...on which side of the dividing line between London and Neverland, the real and the imaginal [*sic*], he wants to position himself" (83). Others attribute this uncertainty to Barrie's supposed psychological issues – his own arrested development and his unusual relationship with the Llewellyn Davies boys. What I find valuable in this line of thinking is the attitude that it reflects towards the genre of children's literature. Unreliable

narrators abound in modernist literature, and their presence in fiction certainly predates the publication of Barrie's novel in 1911. There is nothing particularly shocking about a narrator whose position is unstable or whose version of events seems questionable.

Critics, however, seem to find these types of narrators particularly troubling in children's literature—especially when the unreliable narrator is ostensibly an adult. While many Victorian and Edwardian children's stories do make use of unreliable narrators, these narrators are almost invariably children. Barrie's use of an unreliable *adult* narrator undermines adult authority and encourages readers not to accept everything that they are told.

By allowing child readers to question the authority and veracity of an adult narrator, Barrie encourages children not to accept adult authority without question and suggests that "the truth" is not always clearly defined. Barrie's narrator constantly calls attention to the conscious acts of construction that shape the tale. He reflects on the process of narration and the choices he makes in relating Peter's adventures. This meta-narration is key to Barrie's project of challenging prevailing ideologies and trusting young readers to accept that things are not always black and white. Through his meta-narration and his indecisiveness regarding the veracity of his tale, Barrie's narrator demonstrates his own unreliability and deconstructs the binary relationships between truth and fabrication and between fantasy and reality.

Throughout *Peter and Wendy*, the narrator balances a conscious attention to the construction of the narrative with assertions of his own role as a passive observer of the action. When Peter arrives to take the children off to Neverland, the narrator describes the Darling parents' rush to the nursery in the hopes of preventing their children's

departure. In the midst of his narration, the narrator momentarily interrupts the story to reflect on what would happen if the parents should arrive in time: “If so, how delightful for them, and we shall all breathe a sigh of relief, but there will be no story” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 80). With this statement, the narrator combines an awareness of the story as construct with an indication that he, too, is anxious to see what will happen. While acknowledging that the children must escape in order for the story to progress, his uncertainty suggests that he is merely recording the story as it happens rather than constructing it. Though most of the story is told in the past tense as though the events have already occurred, intrusions like this one challenge the idea of temporal linearity and suggest that the story is happening in the continual present and that events are always subject to change. The narrator’s frequent speculations suggest that even he does not know what will happen next; however, the acknowledgement that “there will be no story” suggests a measure of authorial control.

Barrie emphasizes the narrator’s contradictory position as both observer and creator. Like Milne, who vacillates between his role as storyteller and his suggestions that Christopher Robin should “remember” fictional events, Barrie both disavows and asserts his control over the narrative. The narrator follows his speculation about what will happen with the declaration that “if they are not in time, I solemnly promise that it will all come out right in the end” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 80). This statement undermines the illusion of the narrator as a bystander observing present actions and calls attention to the artificiality of the tale. By promising a happy ending, the narrator suggests that the story is simply a story—a construct over which he has artistic control. At the same time, however, his use of the hypothetical undermines this sense of control. The narrator’s

power is limited; his promise is predicated on the condition that the parents do not arrive in time and serves only as an alternative to the possibility he has already suggested – that they might. In this way, the narrator seems to indicate that though he cannot control the actions of the story, he does have the power to ensure a happy ending.

The narrator continually vacillates between these two mutually exclusive concepts – the narrative as artistic construct and the narrative as an account of real events. He is at various textual moments both an active creator and a passive recorder. To a less obvious extent, this technique is prevalent in many modernist texts through the use of an unreliable first person narrator. In stories like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* and Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*, readers are presented with a narrator who is attempting to record accurately events in which he or she is directly involved. In their attempts to create order, these narrators engage in a rewriting of history – changing details to fit their narrative. But where these narrators try to conceal their obfuscations, Barrie's narrator more directly communicates his contradictory positions as both historical recorder and artistic creator.

The narrator alternately declares his strict adherence to factual accuracy and demonstrates his power to control the characters' lives. In recounting the story of Peter and the bird, he laments the inability of the two characters to communicate. The narrator notes that “in fanciful stories people can talk to the birds freely” and expresses his “wish” that “for the moment I could pretend that this was such a story” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 122). Here, the narrator positions himself as an external observer. He is not creating the story; he is simply relaying it. He has no control over the characters, the events, or the rules of the world. The narrator asserts that “truth is best, and I want to tell you only

what really happened” (122). This declaration of truth reaffirms the veracity of his account and suggests his lack of power and control. Other moments in the text, however, directly contradict this perspective by calling attention to the act of construction. In his introduction of Captain Hook, for example, the narrator remarks: “Let us now kill a pirate, to show Hook’s method. Skylights will do” (92). Readers are then provided with an account of Skylights’ death. This scene suggests the narrator’s complete control over the fictional construct and over the lives and deaths of the characters. In this instance, the narrator takes on the role of author of the tale with the arbitrary authority to control events to fit his whims. The alternation between these two extremes demonstrates the narrator’s refusal to adopt a fixed position in terms of his relationship to the events of the story.

This blurring of boundaries becomes particularly apparent in moments where the narrator breaks from his established role and directly interacts with the characters of his story, becoming a character himself. While the tradition of narrators directly addressing the reader is common in 19th century fiction, Barrie inverts this tradition by having his narrator converse directly with the fictional characters. In one such occurrence, the narrator attempts to provide advice to Tootles and warn him of Tinkerbelle’s plot against Wendy. Moving from the position of objective observer to that of an actor who attempts to alter the course of events, the narrator declares: “Tootles, the fairy Tink who is bent on mischief this night is looking for a tool, and she thinks you the most easily tricked of the boys. ‘Ware Tinker Bell” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 89-90). Immediately following this, however, the narrator reasserts his status as detached observer, declaring “Would that he could hear us, but we are not really on the island, and he passes by” (90). The narrator

seems to indicate that if he had the power to construct the tale as he wishes, Tinkerbelle's plot would not succeed. In this moment, he again asserts his role as a mere re-teller of events that have already transpired and over which he has no control.

In his interactions with Mrs. Darling, however, the narrator contradicts this assertion of his passivity by suggesting that he is, at least to some extent, able to choose how the narrative shall proceed. Alluding to the perceived role of children's literature as moral instruction that was predominant in the Victorian era, the narrator expresses his desire that the children should be taught a lesson. He suggests that they should be punished upon their homecoming by finding the nursery empty and their parents out enjoying themselves rather than anxiously awaiting the children's return. He declares that such an occurrence would "serve them jolly well right" and "would be the moral lesson that they have been in need of ever since we met them" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 163). Despite this desire to teach a lesson, however, the narrator allows the children to have the joyful reunion that they anticipate. His comments suggest that this is not simply because he must relate things as they actually happened, but because "if we contrived things in this way Mrs. Darling would never forgive us" (163). This remark is particularly ambiguous in that it simultaneously suggests both that the narrator is actively constructing the fictional story and that Mrs. Darling is a real person, who would resent this formulation of events.

To further complicate this conflict between narrator as author and narrator as character, the narrator engages in an argument with Mrs. Darling about how to proceed with the tale. The narrator wants to tell Mrs. Darling of the children's impending homecoming to save her from further sorrow, but Mrs. Darling refuses to allow him to

ruin their surprise. The narrator addresses her directly, insisting, ““But, my dear madam...by telling you what’s what, we can save you ten days of unhappiness”” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 163). But, the anxious mother refuses to allow this and upbraids the narrator, declaring, ““Yes, but at what a cost! By depriving the children of ten minutes of delight”” (164). Eventually, the narrator reluctantly concedes and allows Mrs. Darling to be surprised by their arrival. In permitting the character to choose how the story will proceed, the narrator essentially disregards this fictional conversation and proceeds as if Mrs. Darling had no indication of the events which were about to transpire. Notably, in this instance, the narrator does not suggest that events must proceed according to the children’s plan because that is the way things actually happened; rather, the narrative decision results from a character’s insistence that the narrator not spoil the children’s fun. Thus, he both asserts his control and relinquishes his authority to another character: he *could* change the outcome, but Mrs. Darling will not let him.

The narrator character expresses some indignation at Mrs. Darling’s usurpation of his authority. He responds to her rejection of his charitable offer to end her suffering by reasserting his own lack of control. Despite having just attempted to alter the course of the narrative, he once again assumes the role of observer, proclaiming, “That is all we are, lookers-on. Nobody really wants us” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 164). His position of impartiality, however, is once again undercut by the very next line, wherein he expresses his desire to “say jaggy things, in the hope that some of them will hurt” (164). Since an impartial observer would not be able to affect the emotions of the characters whose tale he is merely relating, this line again suggests a direct interaction between the narrators

and the characters. Throughout the text, the narrator seems conflicted about whether the story he narrates is a true relation of events or a fictional construct.

The narrating figure in *Peter and Wendy* presents a complicated vision of adult authority. Rather than providing an impartial narrator who relates events in a manner that would allow children to immerse themselves fully in the fantasy world, Barrie creates a narrator who repeatedly confronts readers with questions about his own role in the narrative. He is both an author figure and a character: a passive observer, a participant, and a creator with power over the lives and deaths of his creations. Consequently, readers cannot merely accept without question the narrator's declarations of "truth." Because the figure who claims to provide "truth" is one whose own role is constantly shifting, as Rose brilliantly illustrates in her own analysis of the narrating voice (*Case of Peter Pan*), readers can never be certain what is true. The narrator contradicts almost every statement he makes—ranging from claims about his own role to his opinions of certain characters. Since the narrator cannot provide a clear indication of what readers should think about anything, readers are left to sort through contradictory impressions and claims. The instability of the narrative opens up possibilities for multiple interpretations of the complex issues that the text raises.

Many critics—both today and in Barrie's time—cite the narrative inconsistencies as evidence that the text is not appropriate for children. Conventional wisdom suggests that children need clear boundaries, and a text that raises more questions than it answers must be too unsettling for child readers. Concern over the text's instability is such that *Peter and Wendy* was heavily edited and excised before it was allowed to be taught in state schools. In her discussion of the re-writing of *Peter and Wendy* for school children,

Rose addresses the “problems” the text posed for those who wished to use it in schools (“State and Language”). Focusing first on the troubling vacillations between elementary English and Latinate prose, she lists other aspects of the text that were deemed “incompatible with writing for the child,” including: “all syntax...or tropes...which are resonant of a classical literary style,” “all specific cultural and material references,” “all signs of play or parody of its own language,” and “all episodes which disturb the logical narrative sequence of the story” (Rose, “State and Language” 101). Finding Barrie’s experiments with narrative voice too complex for children, the schools also removed “virtually all signs of the presence of an identifiable narrator, that is, a narrator who forces on the reader’s attention the question of who is telling the story” (Rose, “State and Language” 101-02). In essence, the state schools removed all experimental elements that might mark the text as modernist, deeming these aspects too threatening or foreign for children.

Rose’s insightful examination of the revisions and cuts that schools made to produce a version of *Peter and Wendy* they deemed acceptable for children addresses many of the problems that contemporary critics have with the text. Notably, the narrative voice in Barrie’s text is so complex, so unsettling, that the schools felt it needed to be entirely erased: “The school version is told almost entirely by an anonymous third person narrator who never appears explicitly in the text to trouble its linguistic address or its utterly sustained cohesion of address” (Rose, “State and Language” 102). Also worth noting is the excision of cultural references; this suggests adherence to a Romantic view of childhood as free from the corrupt influence of adult culture. These erasures are the very elements that are most worth examining for the text’s experiments with modernist

style as a means of complicating prevailing views of childhood. These sites of experimentation provide a productive interference that challenges and at times mocks established genres of children's literature and societal conventions. The experimental narrative voice threatens what society of the time deems appropriate for children's literature both because it insists upon a recognition of children's relationship with adults and adult culture and because it poses questions about authenticity in storytelling and about adult authority. As Gubar rightfully points out, Barrie is among the many Golden Age children's authors who recognize that children are "socially saturated beings" (*Artful Dodgers* 4). Barrie's text constructs the child reader as one who is fully capable both of understanding cultural references and of recognizing the limitations of the narrator's authority, a child who is aware enough not to accept what he or she is told without question. The challenge that the narrator poses to notions of adult authority causes considerable problems for critics because the narrator's resistance to fixed limits not only violates the boundary between author and characters but also the border between the adult and the child.

Suspicion of Adult Authority

The text problematizes adult claims to authority by presenting several flawed figures of adulthood. This deep skepticism of adult authority reflects the disillusionment of the modern age. Modernism is marked by suspicion: of literary conventions, of perceived wisdom, of conventional morality, of objective reality, and of authority. Barrie recognizes the incredible opportunity that fantasy provides for interrogating these concepts. To further that end, he creates a narrating figure who invites suspicion, and

who is, in fact, suspicious of his own authority over the text or over his child readers. The narrator's unease can be understood in terms of the skepticism of the era.

Barrie complicates the perceived border between adult culture and children's culture through the creation of a narrator who is unsure of his own position in either camp. Rather than presenting a stable adult narrator who can reassure child readers, Barrie creates a narrator who is uncertain of his own role or capabilities and who seems unable to distinguish fantasy from reality. In addition to his confusion over the veracity of his tale and his role within the narrative, the narrator seems similarly perplexed about his position in the world outside the text. Specifically, the narrator seems to be having something of an identity crisis regarding his age. The narrator employs an alternating direct address to engage both adult and child readers, but he is sometimes conflicted with regards to his own position in either camp. He is often reluctant to accept the mantle of adult authority. At times he expresses a sense of camaraderie with child readers, aligning himself with them against the adults in the narrative. At other times, he plays the role of a knowing adult, positioning himself alongside the adult reader who shares his somewhat cynical opinion of children. The shifting narration and metafictional style may be a textual representation of the story's genesis from multiple authors – both the adult Barrie and his young friends, the Llewellyn Davies boys. The conventions of oral fiction allow for a more conscious construction of story and active participation from the audience. In adapting Peter's story, Barrie maintains a connection to its oral roots by representing some of these techniques on the page. The narrator's use of direct address suggests that the implied reader will actively engage with the story.

The narrator makes frequent use of direct address in establishing a rapport with his reader, but his ideal reader is sometimes a child and sometimes an adult. Although some critics, like Zipes, insist that the novel “is *not* fiction for children” (xxii) and that the “narrator is *always* addressing other adults as implicit readers” (xxii [emphasis in original]), the text actually contains several indications of a dual address. Early in the story, the narrator refers to Mrs. Darling’s habit of “tidying up her children’s minds” after they have gone to sleep (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 58). Addressing a child reader, he says “If you could keep awake (but of course you can’t) you would see your own mother doing this, and you would find it very interesting to watch her” (58). Despite Hollindale’s belief that “not many children will either understand or like” this bit of “sentimental whimsy” (“Introduction,” xxii), the nominal addressee here is clearly identified as a child, one whose mother partakes of a similar ritual. On the very next page, however, the narrator uses “we” to establish his own and his reader’s role in the community of adults who have been to the Neverland previously and “can still hear the sound of the surf” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 59). Indicating the divide between the young characters and the adult narrator and reader, he declares: “we shall land no more” (59). The narrative constantly shifts between audiences.

Similarly, the narrator’s observations and reflections alternate between his own position as either a child or an adult—or sometimes both simultaneously. He frequently employs the second-person plural pronoun “we” to proclaim his membership in one group or the other or uses “they” to mark a distance between himself and the objects of his remarks. When he observes that “children have the strangest adventures without being troubled by them” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 60), he identifies the children as

“they” (60) and, therefore, separate from “we,” the narrator and his adult readers. The narrator sometimes uses the same “we” to claim membership in the same group as his child readers. Reflecting on the heartlessness of children, the narrator asserts: “...we have an entirely selfish time, and then when we have need of special attention we nobly return for it, confident that we shall be rewarded instead of smacked” (132). Here, the narrator clearly positions himself as one of the selfish children, the “we” who expect reward.

At times, the narrator establishes this divide more directly by drawing clear boundaries between the adult reader and the children at the center of the narrative. In discussing Peter’s shocked reaction to unfairness, for example, he states “Every child is affected thus the first time he is treated unfairly. All he thinks he has a right to when he comes to you to be yours is fairness” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 120). Here, the narrator clearly distinguishes between the “child” and “you,” the adult to whom he belongs. At other moments, however, he takes a childish delight in his own narrative and his diction and tone suggest a shift to a younger audience. This shift in register becomes clear when he cannot decide which adventure to narrate and determines that “the best way will be to toss for it” (111). Other markers that indicate a clear association with child readers include his description of the children’s songs as being “deliciously creepy” (129), and his explanation of Peter’s anxiety about being asked his age as being “like an examination paper that asks grammar, when what you want to be asked is Kings of England” (73). The shift to an allegiance with children is most clear at moments when the narrator contradicts his own earlier views on a subject in accordance with the children’s opinions. Despite his earlier praise of a mother’s love, the narrator is quick to

adopt Peter's darker view of mothers, childishly declaring, "So this was the truth about mothers. The toads!" (132). The narrator constantly switches sides, alternately defending mothers or attacking them, delighting in children's selfishness or berating it, in accordance with whatever group allegiance he has claimed for the moment. He is not secure enough in his identification with either group to maintain a stable sense of belonging.

Besides these deliberate oscillations, the narrator sometimes vacillates between these two positions within a single statement. The comment about children's selfish adventures, for instance, begins with the statement: "Off we skip like the most heartless things in the world, which is what children are, but so attractive" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 132). In this moment, the narrator seems to be occupying both positions simultaneously; he is part of the "we" of heartless children, but he demonstrates an adult's judgment of this behavior and an adult's desire for the "attractive" qualities of childhood. Rather than merely using free and direct discourse to represent the thoughts of various characters (as when he shares the children's reaction to Peter's story), the narrator seems to project himself into the thoughts and feelings of his various potential readers—both adult and child. Through these various intrusions, revisions, contradictions, and complications of his own role, the narrator blurs the boundaries between adult and child. Because he is uncomfortable with or suspicious of adult authority, he presents himself as both a responsible adult and a child at play.

The narrator's discomfort with his own authority is apparent in certain textual markers. Rose points particularly to the narrator's use of phrases like "I suppose." Rose argues that this phrase "inserts the narrator with an apparent disclaimer—his position is

one of uncertainty or mere supposition” (*Case 67-68*). Commenting further on the shifting pronoun usage throughout the text, Rose asserts: “In the process of language, in the slippage from ‘all’ to ‘they’ to ‘you,’ J.M. Barrie’s 1911 version of *Peter Pan* undermines the certainty which should properly distinguish the narrating adult from the child” (*Case 68*). Rose sees the ambiguous position of the narrator as a “momentary loss of narrative *control* [emphasis in original]” (*Case 70*). Other critics, like M. Lynn Byrd, also acknowledge moments where the narrator “simultaneously claims and mitigates his control” over the narrative (58). Pointing to the passage quoted above about “heartless” children, Rose rightly points out that “the voices of the passage contradict each other” (*Case 71*), but she uses these contradictions as evidence that the text “removes itself—by the very nature of its writing” from the domain of children’s fiction. In other words, because the text is complicated and experimental, it cannot be for children.

While I agree with much of what Rose claims about the narrative inconsistencies and violations of genre in *Peter and Wendy*, I disagree with her judgment about its place in children’s literature. Rose’s position relies on an insistence that children’s literature avoids complexity and experimentation. She claims that children’s authors resist these innovations because they share a conception of “the child as a pure point of origin...innocent of all the contradictions which flaw our interaction with the world” (8-9). Barrie’s text does not avoid these things or share this conception; therefore, she argues, it is not really for children. But, Rose overlooks the shift in children’s literature that Barrie’s text exemplifies.

Barrie is not alone in infusing children’s books with complexity, contradiction, and experimentation. Beginning with Lewis Carroll, much children’s fiction, and

particularly children's fantasy, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century rejects earlier tenants of children's fiction to reflect the uncertainty and complexity of the changing times. Thus, we have Carroll's Alice entering a world where language itself and even her own identity become unstable, or Nesbit's characters encountering "the unreliability of the external world" and the subjectivity of language in stories like *The Railway Children* and *Five Children and It* (Anderson 314). Like Carroll before him, Barrie demonstrates the possibilities of formal innovations in children's fantasy literature through his resistance of narrative stability.

Rather than illustrating some failure on the author's part, these slippages highlight the experimental potential of children's literature and of the fantasy genre. Barrie's text reflects a more nuanced understanding of children's relationship to adult culture and of the differences and divisions among children. He views children as socialized subjects and trusts them to draw their own conclusions. The narrator's reluctant acceptance and occasional rejection of his adult authority and his authority over the text open up the narrative and encourage readers to question the judgments and "facts" that the narrator provides. When this behavior is considered within the larger context of the adult characters within the text, the very idea of adult authority is called into question.

The ambivalent narrator demonstrates a distrust of adult authority that is later reinforced by the childish behavior of adults within the play. Mr. Darling essentially throws a tantrum when his tie will not tie and again when the children do not show him the respect he feels he is due after he plays a cruel trick on Nana. Captain Hook's obsession with "good form" (a carryover from his schoolboy days at Eton) and his overwhelming jealousy of those who have it seem similarly childish. Adults in the story

are presented as childish, petty, and absurd, as well as “incompetent and irresponsible” (McGavock 45). In a story where the nominal adults behave like spoiled children, the presumably adult narrator seems similarly uncomfortable with his role as an adult, and switches allegiances between the child and adult reader according to his whims. His reluctance to accept his position as an adult may be due, in part, to a desire to distance himself from the text’s other adult males, whose petulance and immaturity provide a counterpoint to readers’ preconceptions of adults as responsible authority figures.

The adult men in Barrie's play are all deeply flawed. Both Mr. Darling and Captain Hook are intensely self-absorbed figures, who value their reputations above all else. Critics have exhausted a great deal of time and energy exploring the childish and reprehensible behavior of Captain Hook and Mr. Darling, but they almost invariably analyze these failings in terms of Barrie’s supposed Oedipal complex. These critics make much of the fact that the two characters are traditionally played by the same actor, using this doubling to argue that Barrie envisions the father figure as the villain.⁸ Critics find Mr. Darling “contemptible” (Eby 131) and describe his behavior towards his children as “thinly concealed hostility” (Gilead 286). The father is repeatedly painted with the same brush as the ostensible villain of the text. Overlooking the fact that the text itself does not support critics’ claims of the father’s villainy or the children’s “hatred” of him, historical

⁸ John Griffith mistakenly claims that “Barrie stipulated that the same actor should play both Hook and Darling on the stage” and both he and Egan use this assumption to support their readings of Hook’s death as a partial fulfillment of Barrie’s Oedipal desires. Sheridan Morley also argues that the doubling of these characters emphasizes a “Freudian subplot in the play: a father as a terrifying authority figure who must be successfully defeated” (46). Richard Rotert extends this Oedipal drama to the battles between the pirates and lost boys, contending that “the pirates become fathers against whom the children, urged on by Peter, avenge prior transgressions” (115). Pointing to similarities between Barrie’s interest in the subconscious and the Freudian criticism that developed alongside the play, Brigid Brophy, Michael Levey, and Charles Osborne argue: “What small boys in the throes of the Oedipus situation feel about fathers is epitomized in the casting of the same actor as Mr. Darling and as the villain and danger of the piece” (Brophy, Levey, and Osborne 109).

fact deflates much of the criticism that centers on the dual casting of these two characters. In his study of the origins of Peter Pan, Birkin dispels claims of the fundamental doubling of the two characters by pointing out that Barrie originally intended to have Captain Hook played by the actress who was portraying Mrs. Darling – doubling the mother-figure with the ostensible villain. Barrie only altered the casting at the request of Gerald du Maurier, the actor who was playing Mr. Darling. Thus, the reprehensible behavior of both these adult male figures seems to point to the childishness of adults more broadly, rather than a particular hatred of father figures. The narrator's moments of child allegiance and his seeming anxiety over his authority as a narrating adult reinforce this broader perspective.

Through these flawed figures of adult authority, Barrie demonstrates that adults should not always be taken at their word. Adults do not know everything; they are not always right, and they are often quite "childish" in their behavior. They are susceptible to the same failings as children. By exposing the limits of adult authority, Barrie teaches readers to challenge authority more broadly. Just as the pulling back of the curtain in *The Wizard of Oz* exposes the great and powerful wizard as a "humbug," Barrie pulls back the curtain on adult maturity and deflates his adult characters of their power. In doing so, he encourages his readers to question rather than accept everything that they are told or taught to believe.

Generic Instability

Beyond the contradictions and complications inherent in its narration, *Peter and Wendy* demonstrates other formal ruptures. These breaks from tradition and generic convention invite readers to question assumptions and established truths and to accept

that life can sometimes be paradoxical. The text engages with the formal experiments of literary modernism by disrupting conventional chronology and linearity and instead presenting patterns of repetition and circularity. Through these cycles of repetition, Barrie disrupts the narrative of progress—particularly with regards to the central character. Peter’s life has more in common with the meaningless romps and emotional insularity of the protagonist in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* than one might expect. He engages in endless play, devoid of meaning or significance. Each adventure is isolated and ultimately forgettable, as are his connections with every other person in his world. He is detached from those around him, and does not seem to recognize even the value of his own life, declaring that death "will be an awfully big adventure" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 121). Peter's story lacks progress and development; his very life is an endless cycle of repetition.

Children’s literature as a genre is traditionally associated with linear plotting and conventional closure. Sarah Gilead argues that because of these familiar conventions, children’s literature enables adults “to link slippery modern culture to the lost wholeness and stability of an imagined (and largely imaginary past)” (288). In other words, children’s literature, as it is traditionally conceived, serves as a reassuring site of narrative stability. The generic conventions are important because they promote a certain ideology of childhood as a safe space, free of the contradictions and chaos of modern life. *Peter and Wendy* and the other texts explored in this study demonstrate that this conception is largely inaccurate. As Gubar points out in *Artful Dodgers*, 19th century children's literature was never as simple as scholars thought. Barrie's text blends the genres of adventure tale and domestic fiction, disrupts chronological linearity, and

presents fragmented narratives that are interrupted or abandoned according to the narrator's whims. Elements of these various experiments with form can be seen in modernist writers ranging from Virginia Woolf to James Joyce to Jean Rhys. Like many of his more highbrow contemporaries, Barrie subverts the expectation for a complete, linear narrative that adheres to specific genre expectations and instead provides a series of disruptions, fragmentations, inversions, and amalgams that one might expect in modernist fiction.

Peter and Wendy does not conform to expectations of chronological linearity. Like Carroll and Kipling before him and Nesbit after him, Barrie plays with this convention throughout his narrative. Although the general progress of the narrative is relatively linear, the narrator disrupts this linearity whenever he feels that information from earlier or later in the chronology would be helpful or interesting to his readers. In describing the night of Peter's arrival, for example, he shifts from the events that preceded the children's departure, to a point far in the future when the parents are reflecting on how they could have prevented their children's departure, and back again. These shifts in time continue throughout this section of the story, almost as if the parents are listening in on the narration of events and offering their commentary. The abrupt shifts from present action to retrospective commentary are generally not predicated by any transitional phrase. Barrie's narrator simply jumps from "that never-to-be-forgotten Friday" straight to Mrs. Darling's reflection, "I ought to have been specially [*sic*] careful on a Friday" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 63). The transition that reorients the reader follows rather than precedes her comment. At several points, the transitions are omitted entirely, allowing the narrative to jump freely between the two points in time, as Carroll

does in the Alice books. This device intentionally disorients the reader, forcing the reader to experience both moments simultaneously.

Simultaneity is a key technique in modernist art and literature. Citing it as “the second dimension of modernist aesthetics,” Robin Walz describes simultaneity as “a kind of montage in which form is achieved through...juxtaposition” (10). Roger Shattuck alters the terminology slightly to define “simultanism” as “both a logic (or an a-logic) and an artistic technique...a childlike directness of expression free of any conventional order” (349). Shattuck further explains: “[Simultanism] reproduced the compression and condensation of mental processes. It maintained an immediacy of relationship between conscious and subconscious thought” (349). While the events in the above scene do not actually occur at the same time, Barrie creates the illusion of simultaneity by omitting the transitions that would place each element in its proper chronological context. He disrupts the chronology and juxtaposes elements from two different points in the narrative, layering the moments to provide a richer understanding of their significance. Blending the parents’ retrospective commentary with their actual words and actions at the time, Barrie enacts Shattuck’s principles of compression and immediacy. He rejects chronological order and instead invites readers to consider multiple perspectives on the events that transpire.

In addition to his rejection of chronological linearity, Barrie also demonstrates the fragmentation and disjunction that have become synonymous with modernist form. Describing the many adventures that the lost boys have on the island, the narrator observes that “To describe them all would require a book as large as an English-Latin, Latin-English Dictionary, and the most we can do is to give one as a specimen of an

average hour on the island” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 110). Before settling on which adventure to tell, the narrator begins and curtails a series of other adventures. Relating some of the key points of “the brush with the redskins at Slightly Gulch” he teases the reader by interrupting his own narration: “The extraordinary upshot of this adventure was---but we have not decided yet that this is the adventure we are to narrate” (110). He then offers pieces of two other narratives before deciding “to toss for it” and settling on the lagoon. This episode not only demonstrates, once again, the narrator’s ambiguous position within the text (he declares his regret that the story of the lagoon won the coin toss), but it also creates a series of narrative fragments that, despite their lack of wholeness, still contribute to the larger story. In these narrative snippets, Barrie provides a great deal of information about the island and its inhabitants. Barrie is able to invoke a larger context and create a sense of history more efficiently by referencing adventures he does not have the space to relate. These fragments contribute to the narrative by gesturing towards a larger whole.

Barrie similarly invokes larger contexts through his use of allusion, using myth and literary tradition as a way of creating order out of chaos. Yeoman draws a connection between Barrie and his modernist contemporaries in their use of myth. Referencing T.S. Eliot’s discussion of the “mythical method” as a way of imposing order on a chaotic world, Yeoman points out the similarities between Peter Pan and the Greek god Pan as a way of positioning Barrie within this tradition. Yeoman argues that, given the prominence of certain modernist works within London circles, “we may expect that Barrie was to some extent caught up in and affected by the on-going literary debate of the times” (34). Yeoman does not extend this argument beyond a few surface observations

of Peter's relationship to his mythical eponym. More significant, I believe, is Barrie's adaptation of the mythical method in alluding to and reworking the traditions of children's literature.

Where prominent modernist poets like Eliot advocated the use of myth and tradition in developing new methods for modern literature, Barrie relies on the traditions of children's fiction in developing his own new hybrid genre. As Rose acknowledges in her critique of *Peter Pan*, Barrie's story blends and parodies different popular genres of children's fiction—genres that perform very different cultural work. His *Peter and Wendy* is both a boys' adventure story and a work of domestic fiction. It is a fairy tale and a school story. It is the sentimental tale of a tragic boy and the fantasy of a mythic hero. It is sometimes a parody and sometimes a pastiche. In one narrative, Barrie blends, unites, adapts, recreates, and parodies the most popular genres of children's fiction in his day. In the process, he creates something distinctly modern. One contemporary reviewer describes the play as "above everything else a fairy tale, but...a fairy tale which is totally unlike the usual type of such story" (Braybrooke 117). *Peter Pan* and *Peter and Wendy* both invoke and resist the expectations and conventions of multiple genres of children's literature.

Each of these different genres carries with it different ideological perspectives and contexts, and the resultant clashes contribute to the narrative's lack of fixity. Barrie represents the emphasis on emotion and interpersonal relationships that is prevalent in domestic fiction while also representing the rabid individuality and colonizing impulse of the adventure tale. In the character of Hook, the courage, manliness, and "good form" encouraged by the British school story (Hugill) compete with the immorality and cruelty

of the villain of the adventure story. He incorporates the fairy tale's message of possibility with the tragedy's inescapable fate. As hero of the adventure story, Peter tries to cast Wendy into the role of the doting mother, minding the home and waiting anxiously for her son's return. While the ideology of "separate spheres" translates well into the domestic genre, Wendy is not content to play the role assigned to her by the adventure genre. She tries to follow the domestic heroine's path to marriage, but Peter's genre does not allow for such emotional attachments. These conflicting ideologies create much of the drama and humor in Barrie's tale. The story is not merely about the adventures of Peter Pan and Wendy, but about the irreconcilable differences between these two characters and their worlds. Coming from very different generic backgrounds, Peter and Wendy cannot form a single cohesive narrative.

Perhaps the reason why many reviewers do not know what to make of the text is its resistance to classification. In order to evaluate a text, one needs a standard by which to measure it. If one judges *Peter and Wendy* by the standards of any one of the aforementioned genres, it is a failure. Adventure stories should not have girls who want to "mother" and marry the boys. They should not have "lessons" or "examinations" or obscure references to Eton. For that matter, neither should fairy tales or fantasies. Works of children's domestic fiction should not have quite so much blood and violence. School stories do not usually involve fairies or pirates. Rather than adhere to the conventions of any one of these genres, Barrie distills key elements from each of these categories and blends them together to create something distinctly new. The drama of his story results from the juxtaposition of characters, settings, devices, and events from different literary genres that would not ordinarily mix. The interactions between these divergent elements

inevitably lead to conflicts that often reflect larger ideological debates, but because the narrator refuses fixity, the issues remain unresolved.

Treatment of Dominant Ideologies

The device of the unreliable and self-conscious narrator allows Barrie to raise questions about larger issues without having to resolve them conclusively. Barrie uses his narrator's ambivalence to both embrace and subtly challenge the conventional ideologies popular in much of the children's literature of his time. Specifically, his treatment of subjects such as gender, race, class, and empire seems to alternate between reinforcing and parodying the dominant rhetoric. Sifting through the mountains of available criticism on *Peter Pan*, one will inevitably encounter a series of conflicting interpretations. Some scholars denounce Barrie for relegating the female characters to bit parts and tasking them with domestic chores (Brophy, Levy, and Osborne 111), while others see Wendy as the real focus of the drama. Many argue that Barrie reinforces appalling racial stereotypes in his treatment of the "redskins" from the "Piccaninny tribe" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 93); others insist that Barrie was critiquing colonial discourse through his exaggerated racism. Scholars issue compelling arguments to show how Barrie sought to reinforce British nationalism in the aftermath of the Boer War, yet others can convincingly demonstrate that Barrie was merely reflecting the nationalist rhetoric expected in adventure stories. Rather than attempt to prove one side or the other of any of these dichotomies, I will argue that Barrie intentionally complicates these issues through his use of parody. Although the narrator seems at times to defend one position or another, his unreliability allows Barrie to raise questions about gender, class, race, and other issues without actually taking a stand on them. The absurd whimsicality with

which Barrie represents and exaggerates these conflicts prevents readers from taking the narrator too seriously and allows for an ambivalent portrayal of childhood and its relation to adulthood.

Modernist writers make frequent use of parody in their work. Robert Chambers insists that while modernists often denied their reliance on parody, “the rise of modernism, with its relentless preoccupation with formal experimentation and demand for innovation, led to tidal waves of mostly unacknowledged parody in all of the arts” (177). Using Eliot’s *The Wasteland* (which he dubs a mock grail quest) and Joyce’s *Ulysses* (a mock epic) as examples, Chambers argues that modernist authors made frequent use of generic parody in their writing. Indeed, Carroll’s use of nonsense parodies to mock educational practices is one of the characteristics for which he is credited as being a proto-modernist. Chambers explains this affinity for parody in modernist writing in terms of the opportunities parody provides for “burying or rehabilitating tired conventions” and for “twist[ing] existing conventions into unexpected shapes” (178).

In his treatment of societal conventions regarding gender, class, and race, Barrie uses comic exaggeration to mock stereotypes while ostensibly adhering to society’s expectations. Where these stereotypes reflect the conventions and expectations of a literary genre (e.g. domestic fiction or adventure story), Barrie’s humorous imitation enters the realm of parody. Through the use of both nonsense and parody, Barrie is able to represent the problems and excesses of dominant ideologies without openly criticizing or challenging his society’s views on these issues. He does this by “twisting existing conventions” into objects of humor that both embody and undermine existing stereotypes.

In this way, he resists taking sides and instead allows readers to see the potential problems or absurdities while still upholding the stereotypes.

Through his use of parody, Barrie calls attention to socially prescribed roles in order to challenge his society's assumptions about the naturalness or inevitability of these roles. At the same time however, he does not allow his characters to step outside of their prescribed roles. While his exaggeration undermines the dominant ideologies, his character representations reinforce them. R.D. S. Jack writes that "Barrie at his best poses questions in a new way" and "hopes that the audience will continue the process of creation" (*Road to Neverland* 15). Barrie invites his audience into the discussion by both reinforcing and challenging dominant ideologies.

With the issue of gender, Barrie presents characters who alternately uphold and make a mockery of Victorian gender roles. Mr. Darling is the stereotypical responsible Victorian breadwinner. He gains respect from women through his supposed knowledge "about stocks and shares" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 55), and he insists on working out problems rationally. Whereas Mrs. Darling reacts to situations more emotionally, "his way was with a pencil and paper" (56). Barrie simultaneously upholds and mocks these conventions of masculinity through the narrator's repeated assertions that Mr. Darling "was really the grander character of the two" (56) as he calculates whether or not they can afford to keep their firstborn child. While the narrator expresses a respect for this paragon of masculine rationality, readers will clearly recognize the absurdity of calculating the potential costs of mumps, German measles, whooping cough and all other possible expenses that a child might incur before deciding whether to keep it. This over-emphasis on rationality to the exclusion of any emotional factors represents an

exaggeration of masculine virtue to the point of comic excess. The narrator does not seem to recognize Mr. Darling's behavior as nonsensical, but the humorous exaggeration of masculine rationality and economy provides readers with an opportunity to question this supposed masculine virtue.

Mrs. Darling is no less a victim of the exaggerations of parody than her husband. Lest readers think that Barrie wishes to satirize masculine rationality merely to uplift feminine virtues, Barrie provides a parallel mockery of the maternal. The narrator describes in great detail Mrs. Darling's nightly practice of "tidying up her children's minds" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 58). He asserts: "It is the nightly custom of every good mother after her children are asleep to rummage in their minds and put things straight for next morning... When you wake in the morning the naughtiness and evil passions with which you went to bed have been folded up small and placed at the bottom of your mind, and on the top, beautifully aired, are spread out your prettier thoughts" (58). While many scholars view this passage as sentimental indulgence, what Barrie is actually doing in these lines is creating a nonsensical extension of the actual practice of tidying a child's room. In this manner, he exaggerates the domestic duties of motherhood and turns them into an object of humor.

Barrie subtly mocks these gender roles again through the gendered performances of Peter and Wendy. While the children view their maternal and paternal roles as "only make-believe" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 128), these performances exaggerate and interrogate the masculine and feminine roles prevalent in domestic fiction. In their first meeting, Wendy immediately takes on a domestic and maternal role, offering to help Peter reattach his shadow with the condescending remark, "I shall sew it on for you, my

little man” (72). The narrator immediately points out that “he was as tall as herself” (72) to call attention to the pretense inherent in this remark. Throughout the scene, the narrator remarks on the gender specific characteristics of each: “How exactly like a boy!” Peter had tried to stick his shadow on with soap (72), his “boylike” indifference to the shadow’s wrinkles (72), and how easily Wendy is cajoled because she “was every inch a woman” (73). These remarks in themselves may seem to reinforce dominant gender ideologies, but the frequency of these gender-based reflections actually makes them seem more self-conscious and potentially self-mocking than genuine. Rather than simply allowing the children’s actions to reinforce gender stereotypes, the narrator insists on commenting on the gender-based expectations. Wendy’s behavior alone is not sufficient to suggest Victorian femininity, the narrator must constantly point out that Wendy is acting like a lady—reinforcing not only Wendy’s femininity but also the narrative expectations for femininity to which Wendy adheres.

Later in the narrative the performative nature of these gender roles becomes more apparent through comic exaggeration. When Wendy is wounded by an arrow, the boys are not able to move her into the house because “it would not be sufficiently respectful” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 101). Consequently, the only solution is to build a house around her, essentially trapping her in the domestic role. The parodic quality of the maternal role-playing continues in Wendy’s insistence that Michael sleep in a basket because “Wendy would have a baby...and you know what women are” (107). The domestic role is so exaggerated that “the cooking...kept her nose to the pot, and even if there was nothing in it, even if there was no pot, she had to keep watching that it came aboil just the same” (108). Monique Chassagnol describes Wendy as “comically

overeager to play the part...of the indispensable female” (207). Her insistence on playing the part at all times is such that she refuses to rouse the children from their naps as danger approaches because “she thought you simply must stick to your rule about half an hour after the mid-day meal” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 113). Wendy’s exaggerated maternal role calls attention to both the performative quality of this role and the ways in which children imitate the gender roles they see adults performing. Indeed, in their first appearance Wendy and her brother are playing at being their parents.

Chassagnol sees Wendy and the other female characters in Barrie’s play as “happily assuming” their roles (207). In contrast, she insists that the “unhappy males” (207), “find it difficult to perform a satisfying, coherent part” (209). She argues that the female characters find stability and satisfaction in their roles, while each male character “painfully oscillates between various identities, constantly changing masks” (209). Such an interpretation would suggest that Barrie challenges Victorian conceptions of masculinity while assuming that women are, to borrow Chassagnol’s term, “content” (206) with the roles society has assigned to them. Chassagnol argues that Barrie’s beliefs about gender roles grew out of his own experiences of “women smother[ing] males and contribut[ing] to their own oppression” (208). While there is certainly some truth in her claims about how the female characters within the play adhere to their established roles, Chassagnol fails to acknowledge their dissatisfaction with these roles.

Wendy, Tinker Bell, and Tiger Lily all express a desire for a different role from the one that Peter has assigned to them. Even Peter is aware that “there is something [these females] want to be to me” other than his mother (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 128), and the narrator reflects that Wendy “had been much tried” by Peter’s insistence on

viewing her as his mother (129). Their discontent with the roles assigned to them suggests a longing for autonomy or self-definition. None of the characters, male or female, is content at being assigned a narrow role. While they sometimes perform the role with an exaggerated comic zeal, they also express a desire for other roles and other identities. They are only content so long as the role remains a performance, or a game. Citing Barrie's journalism as evidence, Andrew Nash notes: "Barrie was closely attuned to contemporary debates over gender and sexuality" (109). As an author who is very much aware of these debates, Barrie presents a depiction of gender roles that simultaneously represents and critiques prevailing stereotypes.

Barrie uses this comic exaggeration to address issues of class, as well. He demonstrates both the importance of and the potential absurdity of conspicuous consumption in a family's attempt to better its social standing. Specifically, the text mocks the Darlings for their desire to establish themselves as belonging to a higher socio-economic class than their means allow. As Paul Johnson explains in his study of conspicuous consumption in Edwardian England, "virtually all people, even the very poor, use their power to consume...to define their social position" (29). Johnson's study examines how "pattern[s] of consumption...help to establish our social reputation" (29). As early as 1899, Thorstein Veblen outlined this idea of conspicuous consumption in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, observing that "the motive that lies at the root of ownership is emulation" (25). Barrie mocks this type of aspirational expenditure through his descriptions of the Darling family.

The Darlings demonstrate their involvement in a culture of conspicuous consumption through their insistence on maintaining the appearance of an economic

respectability that exceeds their income. They are so concerned with the appearance of propriety that they must have a nurse for the children, even though “they were poor” and could not afford to hire one (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 57). In the world of nonsense, this problem is easily solved: they enlist the services of “a prim Newfoundland dog...who had belonged to no one in particular until the Darlings engaged her” (57). Nana is a most efficient nurse and a model of proper behavior; however, Mr. Darling “sometimes wondered uneasily whether the neighbours talked” (57). Here, again, Barrie uses nonsense to exaggerate the Darlings’ preoccupation with their social standing. Though they are not actually wealthy enough to afford a nurse, they wish to maintain an air of respectability, so they engage Nana. Ultimately, however, this performance of class remains a performance. The lengths to which the Darlings go in order to feign a higher class position are absurd. Thus, while the narrator assures us that Nana was “quite a treasure of a nurse” (57), her presence undermines the seriousness with which the Darlings regard the issue of class standing. Through the Darlings’ absurd attempts at pecuniary emulation, Barrie both represents and exaggerates his society’s obsession with social class and conspicuous consumption.

The same sort of humorous exaggeration undermines Barrie’s seeming reinforcement of dominant ideologies of race—specifically with regard to representations of Native Americans. Barrie’s representation of the “redskins” adheres to many cultural stereotypes of his day. Popular and literary representations of Native American culture often promoted the image of the “noble savage.” Many of the characteristics associated with this stereotype are apparent in Washington Irving’s “Traits of Indian Character,” where he describes the “North American Savage” as “stern, simple and enduring” (297).

Irving writes of the “proud stoicism and habitual taciturnity” that characterized these people (297), but also describes their “barbarity” (302) and their “stratagem in warfare” (304). This image of the noble savage was popularized by novels like James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, while some of the darker stereotypes about the cruelty and savagery of Native Americans are apparent in works like *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* with Mark Twain’s creation of the despicable villain, Injun Joe.

Barrie employs both the stereotype of the noble savage and the stereotype of the cruel and barbarous “redskin” in *Peter and Wendy*, but in both cases he exaggerates these stereotypes to the point of comic absurdity. Thus, not only do “their naked bodies gleam with paint and oil” with scalps “strung around them” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 93), but one of them carries “so many scalps that...they somewhat impede his progress” (93). The parody inherent in Barrie’s treatment of the natives is most apparent in their battle with the pirates. The narrator describes in great detail the conventions of “savage warfare” (136). He explains that “it is always the redskin who attacks, and...he does it just before the dawn” (136). He further explains the white men’s role in this scenario: to build camp near the stream and “await the onslaught” (137). With significant criticism of the pirates, who violated the conventions by attacking first, the narrator explains that the natives “had time to gather in a phalanx that would have been hard to break had they risen quickly, but this they were forbidden to do by the traditions of their race” (138). For this reason, the “redskins” wait an appropriate amount of time after the pirates’ sudden appearance before stirring and are consequently slaughtered.

In describing this battle, Barrie exaggerates racial stereotypes to the point of absurdity. The pirates win because the natives refuse to step outside of their stereotypical

roles. As Paul Fox observes: “The Indians live in Barrie’s text according to expectation” (“Time of His Life” 39). Because Barrie does not allow them to step outside of the roles proscribed to them by the historical accounts of white men, they cannot adapt when Hook changes the script. By refusing to accept his prescribed role as a white man (while staying true to his role as a treacherous villain), Hook is able to change the outcome and emerge victorious. In properly performing their part despite the altered circumstances, the natives ensure their own destruction. Where Barrie earlier raised questions about the performativity of gender roles, he here calls attention to the performativity of race. Namely, Barrie outlines the exact generic expectations for Native Americans in an adventure story. The pirates change the script, but Barrie's "redskins" must continue to play their assigned part. Because they are caricatures rather than characters and are entirely ruled by stereotypes, they cannot break script even to save their own lives. Through his description of the battle, Barrie both reinforces racial stereotypes and highlights their absurdity by creating a scenario in which strict adherence to convention leads to destruction.

Without acknowledging the relationship between parody and modernism, Hollindale condemns Barrie for his use of parody in this battle. Hollindale echoes a common criticism of parody in children’s literature when he expresses his belief that these parodic elements “are just an irritating puzzle” for child readers (“Introduction” xxii). Similar claims have been made about the use of irony in *Winnie-the-Pooh* and the linguistic experiments in Gertrude Stein’s children’s books. I find these assertions of what types of humor children can or cannot appreciate troubling, in that the critics making them rarely bother to distinguish between a child of three and a child of 13 in

their claims. Furthermore, these criticisms are largely ahistorical in the sense that they disregard the extent to which children of Barrie's time were likely to be more familiar with the particular texts and genres he parodies. While younger readers may have trouble appreciating some of the subtler parodies (the treatment of "good form," for example), I would argue that many child readers are perfectly capable of seeing the humor in the redskins' battle with the pirates. Parody requires a familiarity with the subject or genre being mocked as well as recognition of the humorous excess. Children who read adventure stories or domestic fictions or fairy tales would be familiar enough with the conventions to recognize some of Barrie's humorous mockery. The popularity of such contemporary children's books as Jon Scieszka's *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* demonstrate that at least some children are capable of appreciating the parodic humor that Barrie employs in his treatment of societal conventions of race, gender, and class.

Chassagnol rightly points out that "male and female characters...conform to the stereotyped gender roles they consider assigned to them" (206), but I would argue that this conformity is not restricted to gender performance. Each character in the story takes on the role that his or her gender, race, and economic position would dictate as well as the roles dictated by the literary genres they represent. While Hook may seem an exception to this rule, his unpredictability actually results from his struggle to balance conflicting rules: the dandy who tries to lure Wendy away, the Etonian obsessed with "good form," the villainous pirate captain, and the white Victorian adult male. He is not, as Fox suggests, able "to act out roles unwritten for him" ("Time of His Life"); rather, his actions are sometimes unexpected because his multiple roles are overwritten, with

various codes taking prominence at particular moments. Hook's internal conflicts are essentially generic conflicts. Because the story blends so many different genres, Hook is forced to occupy multiple conflicting roles. He is the villain of the adventure story, the representation of patriarchal power, the seducer, the headmaster, and a schoolboy at the same time. Through the layers of conflicting roles, Hook undermines the rigidity of generic stereotypes.

Barrie's treatment of these subjects (and others) reflects what Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb refer to as the "mood of uncertainty" that dominates *fin de siècle* children's writing (76). Thacker and Webb argue that children's texts in this period reflect "a darker, more pessimistic sensibility" and are "characterized by uncertainty" (74). Children's authors are more self-conscious and often rely on "an underlying sense of irony" in their treatment of subject matter (Thacker and Webb 78). Barrie's over-the-top representation of gender, class, and racial stereotypes demonstrates a loss of faith in dominant ideologies. Through nonsense and parody, Barrie highlights the excesses and absurdities inherent within these social stereotypes and encourages readers to question inherited assumptions about these categories.

Disruption of Romantic Ideal

By suggesting that race, class, and gender roles may result from socially-conditioned performances, Barrie resists a simplistic representation of childhood as free of adult influence. While many Victorians "embraced a strand of Romantic thinking that posits children as a race apart" and attempts to "fix the child in place as an isolated emblem of innocence" (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 3-4), Barrie moves away from this restrictive view of childhood as a separate, unique state that precedes the corrupting

influence of adult culture. Instead, Barrie presents a more complex view of childhood and its relationship to adult culture, one that is more in line with his modernist contemporaries. Barrie's depiction of children "is decidedly ambiguous, far from the sweet innocents of other Victorian writers" (Wiggins 83). Rejecting the Romantic ideal of the child who is free from the constraints and corruption of adulthood, Barrie suggests that adult culture has a significant effect on children's development and that children are more psychologically complex than adults would like to believe. Rather than adhering to the Romantic view of childhood innocence, Barrie insists that children are both "innocent and heartless" (178). As Karen Coats points out, "Peter...is a difficult character to love" (8). Although many of Barrie's contemporaries (and many later scholars) read the text as an indulgence in escapism and sentimentalism, the text resists such characterizations through its treatment of both the children and the Neverland. Neither Peter, the eternal child, nor any of the other children in the play is as sweet and innocent as Romantic culture would have us believe.

With Peter, Barrie creates a child figure who has been subsequently idealized and fetishized, but who, in his original form, is both desirable and reprehensible. Allison Kavey praises Barrie for "reveal[ing] the nastiest aspects of childhood, rather than simply genuflecting at the altars of innocence and youth" (3), but Barrie does not merely choose to expose the darker side of childhood. Instead, he presents a more complex portrait of childhood that acknowledges both the good and the bad. His vision is shared by Milne, who later describes childhood in terms of both "brutal egotism" and its more softening "physical beauty" and "charm" (vi). Peter is innocent, naïve, trusting, imaginative, and full of joy; but he is also manipulative, violent, vindictive, controlling and heartless.

While Peter retains the primal authenticity, freedom, and imaginative power of the Romantic ideal, Barrie complicates this vision by acknowledging the darker sides of Peter and of childhood. Jack astutely observes that “[Barrie] had no illusions about the drawbacks of childhood innocence...Irresponsible egocentricity also has its villainous side” (*Road to Neverland* 167). Rather than glossing over children’s negative traits, Barrie chooses to highlight both the positive and the negative, placing them side by side and allowing readers to draw their own conclusions.

Barrie introduces Peter as an eternal and universal figure of childhood, but even in this first depiction the darker elements are present. In Wendy’s discussion with her mother about Peter Pan, readers learn that Mrs. Darling “remembered a Peter Pan who was said to live with the fairies” from her own childhood (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 60). From Wendy’s comments and Mrs. Darling’s memories, readers learn that Peter is “rather cocky” and that “when children died he went part of the way with them so that they should not be frightened” (60). Wendy also assures her mother that “he isn’t grown up...he is just my size” despite her mother’s insistence that Peter “would be grown up by this time” (60). In the same moment that Barrie introduces the figure of the eternal child, he also introduces his biggest flaw (his cockiness) and his unsettling connection with death.

The characterization of Peter’s relationship to dead children is rather innocuous in *Peter and Wendy*; Peter may seem kind for comforting these lost souls. However, Barrie’s original readers were probably quite familiar with the stories of Peter in *Peter Pan and Kensington Gardens*. Published 5 years prior to the novel, it was the only Peter text by Barrie that was available to the public at that time. Mrs. Darling’s vague

recollection seems to be alluding to these stories. In this earlier text, Barrie provides more detail about Peter's involvement with the dead children. When Peter finds children who have perished in the Gardens after Lock-out time, he does not merely escort their souls a part of the way; rather, he "digs a grave for the child...at once" and buries it (Barrie, *Kensington* 341). Reflecting on the alacrity with which Peter acts, the narrator reflects rather darkly: "I do hope that Peter is not too ready with his spade" (Barrie, *Kensington* 341). The implication of this comment is that Peter may not always be certain the child is dead before he buries it. Beyond this grotesque implication, the narrator also acknowledges the feelings of the parents who "hurry into the Gardens at the opening of the gates looking for their lost one, to find the sweetest little tombstone instead" (Barrie, *Kensington* 341). Thus, for a reader familiar with the earlier text, Mrs. Darling's comment takes on a darker meaning. Peter not only guides these dead souls on their journey, but he may also occasionally hasten their demise.

While this dark suggestion relies on knowledge of the earlier text, Barrie also includes several more direct suggestions of Peter's extreme disregard for the welfare or lives of his companions. When Tinker Bell helps him find his shadow in the Darlings' dresser, he shuts her in the drawer and forgets about her. His reaction when he later remembers that he trapped her is "gleeful" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 75). Though he subsequently apologizes to the fairy, the apology seems perfunctory in light of his amusement over her predicament. When he teaches the Darlings to fly, he fails to mention the necessity of fairy dust until the children have jumped around foolishly for a bit. Again, the narrator suggests that "Peter had been trifling with them" for his own amusement (79). The amusement Peter demonstrates in these instances is hardly

damning evidence, but it points to a pattern of self-absorption that the character demonstrates throughout the play.

Peter's *schadenfreude* becomes more troubling on the journey to Neverland. The narrator observes that whenever the children got sleepy, they would begin to fall to their deaths. "The awful thing," the narrator explains "was that Peter thought this funny" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 82). Peter would rescue the falling child, but he would take his time doing so, and "you felt it was his cleverness that interested him and not the saving of human life" (82). Peter's disregard for his friends' welfare suggests a darker side to this figure of eternal childhood. Because Peter only cares about his own amusement and quickly tires of one game in favor of another, the narrator observes that "there was always the possibility that the next time you fell he would let you go" (82). Peter is not a heroic figure. He rescues the other children only to reinforce his high opinion of himself. His ego, rather than any concern for others, is his driving force.

The dark implications of Peter's selfishness (or, more to the point, "childishness") are not subtle. When the Darling children decide to return home, Peter attempts to bar the window so they will believe their parents no longer want them. Both on and off the island, Peter must always choose the game and make the rules. Those who break the rules must suffer the consequences, and sometimes the game itself is so dangerous that even those who play by the rules cannot survive. The narrator acknowledges the very real danger of association with Peter in his introduction to the lost boys: "The boys on the island vary, of course, in numbers, according as they get killed and so on; and when they seem to be growing up, which is against the rules, Peter thins them out" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 89). In this casual reference, the narrator introduces two important concepts:

that children die on the island and that those deaths are not make-believe. Though the narrator's tone is light, his comment alerts readers that this fairyland is no escapist utopia; it is a dangerous place from which the children might never be able to return.

Additionally, we learn that Peter has complete authority and little (if any) mercy. If children do not play by his rules, he "thins them out." Whether this means banishment from the lost boys or death, the suggestion certainly problematizes characterization of the text as a "sentimental" or "nostalgic" representation of childhood.

Barrie's text demonstrates that the very qualities for which his culture worships children carry with them more negative characteristics. Peter and the other children are free from the burdens of adult society, but they use this freedom to play war games that occasionally result in their own deaths. They are innocent and naïve, but this naiveté makes them vulnerable to tricks and manipulation. They do not understand the potential consequences of their actions, but blindly follow their leader. They have tremendous imaginative power, but they lose the ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. The lost boys come to believe that Wendy really is their mother, and the Darling children begin to forget their real parents and their lives back home. The lost boys regularly invent stories about their own pasts with absolute confidence in the truth of their statements. Even Wendy, who "tried to fix the old life in [her brothers'] minds by setting examination papers on it" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 108), starts to lose touch with her former life. The narrator observes that the questions on these exams "were all written in the past tense" because "Wendy...had been forgetting too" (109). Because the children believe so whole-heartedly in the truth of their make-believe stories and games, reality itself loses meaning in Neverland. Meaning becomes completely unstable and

conditional. Even identity is conditional in Neverland. The Darling boys are sometimes Wendy's brothers and sometimes her sons. Peter is sometimes her husband and sometimes her son. The lost boys are sometimes redskins (in the battle of Slightly Gulch) and sometimes pirates (after taking over Hook's ship). Their ability to indulge in fantasy leaves them incapable of knowing what is real.

Rather than idealizing childhood, Barrie shows that children are capable of violent actions, sometimes without any remorse or awareness of wrongdoing. The lost boys shoot Wendy, slaughter the pirates, tell tales on one another, threaten Wendy when she wants to leave, and abandon their leader without a second thought as soon as they get a better offer. The only time they show remorse for their actions is when those actions threaten their own well being, as when Tootles fears Peter's retribution for having shot Wendy. Their complete lack of compassion is apparent from the eerie way in which Slightly counts aloud as the pirates are slaughtered (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 154-57; 158). Wendy and her brothers are no better. They demonstrate no remorse or pity for the parents they have left behind, and even the youngest expresses his pride over killing his first pirate.

The children in this novel are at times innocent, vulnerable, and playful, but at other times they are violent, petty, unrepentant, fickle, and selfish. Barrie's depiction of childhood is as ambiguous and conflicted as his treatment of all other subjects. Patrick Braybrooke, one of Barrie's contemporaries, lauds Barrie for his nuanced understanding of the child's mind, admiring his recognition that "children are selfish...without being aware of the fact" (121). Barrie does portray the selfishness of children as a sort of unconscious egotism, but he does not consequently dismiss this selfishness as being any

less cruel than that of Captain Hook or other adults in the play. The children are not acquitted for their selfishness because they are unaware of it. Barrie's narrator repeatedly addresses the cruelty of their actions, and the children themselves acknowledge the suffering of the parents they have abandoned. Ultimately, Barrie calls attention to both the positive and negative sides of childhood, concluding his novel with his judgment that "children are gay and innocent and heartless" (*Peter and Wendy* 178). Moving toward a more modernist understanding of the child as a psychologically complex individual, Barrie's characterization rejects a one-sided view of childhood, insisting instead on both the innocence and the heartlessness. These characteristics are, for Barrie, inherently linked.

Isolation and Alienation

Barrie insists on presenting multiple conflicting perspectives on every issue. In the same way that he represents children as both innocent and heartless, Barrie suggests that Peter's eternal youth is both enviable and tragic. Early reviewers of the play *Peter Pan* recognized this "touch of heart-breaking tragedy" (Mackail qtd. in Birkin 117) amidst the merriment and acknowledged "the pathos of Peter, the utter sadness of the Never, Never Land" (Braybrooke 122). Peter is free to indulge in eternal play and adventure—to experience "ecstasies innumerable that other children can never know" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 169), but this freedom has a cost. Carpenter sees this duality as central to Barrie's vision: "Barrie is reminding his audience of the limitations as well as the marvels of childhood, and of the price that has to be paid by those who choose to remain as children. Though the play is in a sense a celebration of immaturity, it is an awful warning to those who choose to remain immature" (179). Carpenter undercuts this

assertion of balance when he later refers to Peter as “God-like” (180) and *Peter Pan* as “an alternative religion” (181), but I find his initial instinct valuable. The text is both celebration and cautionary tale; this ambiguity reflects its resistance to fixed interpretation and presents a more balanced view of childhood. Peter is a hero to some and a “tragic figure” to others. Barrie lends equal weight to each perspective and allows readers to draw their own conclusions about the value and costs of eternal youth.

To be eternally young, one cannot grow or develop or maintain any sense of the past. This means that Peter cannot remember his friends, his enemies, or even his own history. Some critics, like Kavey, have argued that this inability to remember provides Peter with a great deal of freedom. Kavey suggests that Peter’s lack of memory is enviable because it prevents him from having to feel any remorse or regret for the pain that he causes others (11). With an implication of agency on Peter’s part, Fox suggests that “Peter’s willed capacity to ‘forget’” allows him to remain “unburdened by memories of the past” (“Time of His Life” 23). Fox argues that “forgetting one’s past and creating one’s own identity are the privilege of the thoroughly modern individual” (“Time of His Life” 37). Peter’s inability to remember, however, does not merely enable him to reinvent himself at whim; it prevents him from learning from past mistakes, and it prevents him from forming human connections.

To remain in the eternal present, Peter must forget the good along with the bad. He forgets his promise to return for Wendy each year. He forgets Tinker Bell. When Wendy tries to reminisce about their victory over Captain Hook, he “carelessly” informs her: “I forget them after I kill them” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 172). Peter cannot build lasting relationships because he forgets everyone but Wendy (and

sometimes even her). Because he has no sense of time, he forgets to come for Wendy for decades and then discovers that she has betrayed him by growing up. His eternal youth condemns him to eternal isolation.

Barrie establishes Peter's isolation in the novel's opening line: "All children, except one, grow up" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 55). Peter is the only exception to this universal rule. He is the only child who can remain a child forever. Because of this distinction, he is unable to accept the Darlings' offer to adopt him. When the Darling children return home and the Darling parents adopt the lost boys into their family, Peter is left out in the cold "looking through the window at the one joy from which he must be forever barred" (169). Peter can never experience the love of a family because of his position as *the* eternal child. For this reason, Wendy "felt at once" upon meeting him "that she was in the presence of a tragedy" (72). Peter's static position renders him separate from the others, who will grow and develop and eventually die. He is permanently "othered" by his status; a peripheral figure who remains "on the outside looking in" (Rotert 114). Peter experiences "one desertion after another" (Kincaid, "Loving Peter"), until he is completely alone. While the others can move beyond their Neverland adventures, Peter is incapable of growth. In the end, he is left alone on his island, without lost boys or pirates to play with him.

Peter's isolated status does not merely result from his physical isolation at the end of the narrative. He is always a figure set apart from the others. "Peter was not quite like other boys" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 121), as the narrator repeatedly reminds readers. All of the children engage in imaginative play; however, Peter alone seems completely unaware of the distinction. Describing the "make-believe" meals that Peter sometimes

decreed, the narrator observes “Make-believe was so real to him that during a meal of it you could see him getting rounder” (108). While the other children find these make-believe meals “trying,” Peter seems unable to distinguish between a make-believe meal and a real one. He does not require physical sustenance, because the imaginary food sustains him just as well. Peter does not understand the barrier between fantasy and reality. Because of this, playing house with Wendy disturbs him, and he must seek her assurance that he has not actually grown into a man in the process: “I was just thinking,” he said, a little scared. ‘It is only make-believe, isn’t it, that I am their father?’” (Barrie 128).

Peter’s inability to distinguish fact from fiction connects to his inability to remember. Wendy must remind him when something is just pretend, because Peter himself seems incapable of remembering even his own actions or identity from one minute to the next. In the opening scene, Wendy sees him crying over his lost shadow, but when she warns sewing it on will be painful, he “was already of the opinion that he had never cried in his life” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 72). At other points in the narrative, the narrator asserts: that Peter believes every story he invents, that “Peter had seen many tragedies, but he had forgotten them all” (114), and that Peter “often met it [unfairness], but he always forgot it” (120). Readers cannot even be certain about the trauma of abandonment that defines Peter’s character. Though he tells the others how he once attempted to return home only to find his mother had locked him out and replaced him, the narrator questions the veracity of this tale and can only assure us that “Peter thought it was true” (132). Indeed, Wendy is “never quite sure” whether or not Peter has had an adventure when he goes out on his own, because “he might have forgotten it so

completely that he said nothing about it” or he may have invented the tale entirely (110). Peter has no memory because memory requires the passage of time, and Peter “had no sense of time” (172). One can only remember the past because it is past. Since Peter never grows, ages, or develops, he can have no sense of history. He lives in the eternal present. Thus, Peter’s memory is like that of a small child who “remembers” things that happened before he or she was born. Imagination and memory are the same for Peter.

Peter's inability to distinguish between fantasy and memory results from his atemporal existence. Several critics have explored Peter’s relationship with time, generally concluding that Peter is a character who exists outside of time. Many of the studies refer to Peter’s engagement in perpetual play or the repetitive, cyclical nature of his existence. James Kincaid describes Peter’s life in terms of “inconsequential play,” explaining that “Peter manages to conduct the adventures so that they are repeatable and yet infinitely variable” (“Loving Peter” 104). McGavock provides a particularly relevant insight for the purposes of this study when she declares: “All time is continuously present for Peter” (199). McGavock and others examine this resistance to linearity in terms of Peter’s liminality. He is a character who can never be fixed in place or time, one with no beginning or ending, who resists boundaries of all kinds, and can neither move forward or reflect on the past.

Though McGavock actually uses the phrase “continuously present” in her description of Peter’s state, critics to date have not drawn a connection between Barrie’s play and the modernist aesthetic promoted by Gertrude Stein. Barrie’s work predates Stein’s theories of the continuous present, but his main character seems to embody the concept as Stein explains it. In “Composition as Explanation” Stein describes the

continuous present in terms of circularity, repetition, and inclusiveness—of “including everything” and “beginning again and again within a small thing” (518-19). Stein posits that “the only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen” (520). Thus, in her view, life is a series of repetitions with infinite variation. Stein uses the term “insistence” to encapsulate this concept of repetition with a difference. The only thing that constantly changes, Stein argues, is one’s perspective. The same event can have a different meaning depending on who witnesses it or at what point in one’s life one witnesses it. Because Peter is stuck in a permanent cycle of continuous play, without growth or memory, his life enacts Stein’s ideas of the continuous present. Peter’s life is a constant repetition, a constant re-living of momentary adventures that are infinitely variable and yet essentially unchanging, without reference to past or future. He has no sense of time, no sense of history, and no sense of self. Everything and everyone becomes a part of Peter’s game, but Peter forgets them as soon as they are out of sight, and he does not remember that he has played the game before. The lost boys, pirates, and fairies are replaced with the passage of time, but Peter is not aware of the alterations. His continuous forgetting allows him to experience each adventure and each moment anew.

Peter does not know who or what he is, because to exist in the moment one must become completely unaware of everything outside of the moment. Peter is alienated not only from the other children, but also from himself. He is incapable of self-knowledge. The narrator expresses his doubt that Peter ever thinks or reflects on anything and assures us that “Peter...just said anything that came into his head” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 81) and believes whatever he invents. This self-alienation and complete faith in imaginative power allows him to change sides in the middle of a battle, suddenly declaring “I’m

redskin to-day” (Barrie 110). Peter exists in a liminal space. His identity is contingent, and unstable. Fox explores the liminality of the Neverland and determines that within Neverland, “meaning is provisional, contingent upon the moment within which it is conceived” (“Other Maps” 259). The same can be said of identity within Neverland. Nothing is stable because at any moment it can be reimagined and, thus, reconstituted as something entirely different.

For Peter, identity itself is unstable because it relies on an imaginative choice: “Anyone, according to Peter’s whims, may turn suddenly at the most unexpected times into anyone else” (Chassagnol 210). These traits also lead him into trouble. When Hook poisons a sleeping Peter’s medicine, Peter refuses to heed Tinker Bell’s warning because he “quite believ[es] himself” when he says he never slept (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 145). He does not know his age, but declares “at a venture” that he “ran away the day [he] was born” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 73). In addition to the suspicion aroused by the narrator’s description of Peter’s “unease” and lack of knowledge on the subject, this assertion becomes even more suspect in light of Wendy’s description of him as being about her age and the readers’ knowledge that “Peter never grows any older” (Barrie, “Kensington” 310). When Hook asks Peter who he is, he again “answer[s] at a venture,” declaring: “I’m youth, I’m joy...I’m a little bird that has broken out of the egg” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 160). The narrator further undermines Peter’s self-declaration by assuring the reader that “this, of course was nonsense” (160) and that Peter’s response proves to Hook that “Peter did not know in the least who or what he was” (160). Peter’s self-alienation allows him to continue believing that his carefree existence is preferable to growing up, but it also assures his continued isolation. Because he cannot understand

who he is, where he comes from, or what he wants, he must forever remain a “Betwixt-and-Between,” as Barrie describes him in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (302).

The modernist figure is often alienated from his or her environment, surrounded by people and activity, but ultimately alone. This figure can be seen in the writings of Franz Kafka, Joyce, Hemmingway, Stein, Lawrence (a writer whom Barrie particularly admired), and Woolf, among others. Peter’s alienation extends to an alienation from himself. Furthermore, he is denied any possibility for change, development, or growth. In this sense, Barrie’s novel becomes a modernist novel of arrested development. Jed Esty explains that “arrested development is such a vital trope for modernist fiction” (21). Describing what he terms “the novel of unseasonable youth,” Esty argues that such novels challenge the narrative of social progress (33) by bringing attention to marginalized figures. Esty sites works like Kipling's *Kim*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Woolf's *The Voyage Out*, Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, and Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark* to explore how modernist authors invert and subvert the generic expectations of the *bildungsroman*. By establishing Peter as a figure incapable of growth, Barrie joins this new tradition. Barrie emphasizes Peter’s isolation and “otherness” throughout the narrative; Peter is a figure who is defined by his marginal status. For this reason, he remains “the tragic boy” despite his eternal carefree youth.

Choice

What I find remarkable in Barrie’s construction of Peter, in particular, and childhood, in general, is his complication of the concept of free choice. As with his treatment of other topics, Barrie creates a masterpiece of modernist indeterminacy in

which the answers are never clear-cut. Thus, while generations of readers have regarded Peter as the boy who *chooses* not to grow up, Barrie also includes several indications that Peter may not have a choice. In the same way, he explores how the choices made by other children are largely influenced by adult society. Barrie gives his child characters a great deal of agency and autonomy but simultaneously implies that their choices may not be as freely made as they (or we) believe. His text is intentionally ambiguous on the issue of choice, allowing for multiple possible interpretations and highlighting the contradictions inherent in our understanding of such issues.

Barrie is not unique among Golden Age children's authors in insisting that children are influenced by adult culture, by adult action, and by adult perceptions. Gubar identifies several of Barrie's contemporaries who "also refuse to characterize child protagonists as miraculously autonomous agents" (*Artful Dodgers* 5). But for Barrie, the issue of adult influence is central. Thus, in the very beginning of *Peter and Wendy*, the narrator relates how Wendy became aware "that [she would] grow up" at the age of two because of her mother's nostalgic desire that she could stay forever young (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 55). The present action of the novel and the opening scene of the play both depict the children playing at being their parents. While these performances reflect the children's desire to grow up, which is a choice that conflicts with their parents' desire for them to stay forever young, they also reflect the Darling parents' personalities and the cultural ideologies that would, for example, warrant "extra pomp...due to the birth of a male" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 64). In this opening scene Barrie both suggests the agency and free choice that children possess and undercuts it by emphasizing how even children's games are shaped by society.

Children can choose to reject the sentimentalized constructions that adults try to impose on them, but adult conceptions of childhood and constructions of the “ideal child” inevitably influence the development of actual children. Barrie illustrates this point most effectively through his treatment of Peter’s eternal childhood. Other characters idealize and worship Peter as *the* eternal child, and this hero worship shapes Peter’s self-perception. He conceives of himself as a hero who has chosen to reject all the trappings of the adult world, but in reality, Barrie’s text is not as clear about the extent to which Peter has a choice. Having been denied the possibility of growth, Peter is forever stuck in a lonely and stagnant existence that others have too positively interpreted as a heroic ideal.

Many critics see Peter’s eternal youth as a choice. Chassagnol, Kincaid, and Rotert all insist that Peter chooses to reject an ordinary life. Kincaid elaborates on this choice to assert that “Peter sees adulthood as a trap and is willing to give up everything in order not to fall into it” (*Child-Loving* 278). McGavock insists that “Peter Pan *chooses* [emphasis in original] not to grow up” (41). Jack, too, sees Peter’s eternal youth as a “refusal to age,” and argues that “Wendy....chooses Linear time” with its inevitable aging and death (*Road to Neverland* 182). Rotert declares that “the boys...abandon their youthful Neverland identities to become adults, although Peter...refuse[s] the invitation” (120). Kavey actually argues that Peter has the better end of the bargain because the others must “live out their choice to return,” while Peter “gets to move between Neverland and the nursery” without restriction (7). Coats also seems to think Wendy made a bad decision, “giving up many ecstasies for the arguably paler consolations of family life” (17). Adrienne Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries express a similarly positive

outlook on Peter's refusal to grow up, describing him as "the ultimate in child autonomy and agency" (16). Jack has a slightly bleaker outlook; he recognizes that either choice requires a form of loss, but he still insists that the characters have a choice. Few critics acknowledge, as Gilead does, that "Peter is imprisoned by his inability to grow up" (285). Rather, the majority of critics views Peter's arrested development as the result of his conscious choice to remain young and Wendy's subsequent aging as the result of her choice to grow up.

Critics who address the darker implications of Peter's eternal youth still insist that it is self-imposed. Reflecting that "the only way to arrest growth is to die," Cecil Degrotte Eby argues that Peter "in a sense...is already dead" (132). But, while Eby acknowledges the permanence of this position, he still sees it as a form of "self-exile" (132) that Peter has chosen. Coats describes Peter as "a child who has chosen not to live" (21) and recasts his eternal childhood as a decision to "opt out of life altogether" (12). These critics couch their language in terms of tragedy, but they still rely on the language of choice, asserting that Peter and the others decide their own fates. Yeoman illustrates this concept of a tragic choice most clearly, declaring that Peter is "trapped in a static, cyclical round of arbitrary adventure which he refuses to sacrifice and, in human terms, this refusal is his tragedy" (67). The idea that Peter chooses this life for himself seems so obvious to these critics that none of them bother to prove it; they merely rely on the character's own assertion that he never wants to grow up.

These interpretations are all validated by elements of the text, but because Barrie insists on indeterminacy, the text could also be used to prove that the children do not actually possess this much agency in choosing their fate, despite what Peter may say to

the contrary. Such a reading would demonstrate that Peter does not choose to remain a child anymore than Wendy and the other boys choose to grow up. Barrie sees Peter as a tragic figure, a boy who longs to grow up but cannot. In his notebooks, Barrie later reflected: “It is as if long after writing ‘P. Pan’ its true meaning came to me—Desperate attempt to grow up but can’t” (qtd. in Routh 300). Both of these ruminations suggest that Peter is the victim of circumstances, not a child who refuses to grow up but a child who cannot grow up. In a stage note to the first published edition of the play in 1928, Barrie characterizes Peter’s desire to remain a little boy forever as “his greatest pretend” (*Peter Pan* 151). Peter’s story and back story reinforce this concept of choice as an illusion or a “pretend.” In this reading, the real tragedy of Barrie’s tale is that no one has a choice: “All children, except one, grow up” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 55). Peter is the only exception to the inevitability of aging. All other children must grow up; Peter cannot.

The stories from *The Little White Bird* that Barrie republished as *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* provide extensive background on Peter’s origin story that could be used to establish his inability to grow up. These stories take on a more pathos-laden tone simply because the adult narrator who tells them has a different perception of Peter than the adult narrator of *Peter and Wendy*. The narrator of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* repeatedly reminds readers of Peter’s liminal status: “he is only half human” (Barrie 297); “he is ever so old, but he is really always the same age” (298); he is “a Betwixt-and-Between” (302), a “poor little half-and-half” who is not “exactly human...nor exactly a bird” (302). The premise of the narrator’s stories is that all children begin life as birds. Peter was only able to fly away from his home because he did not realize he was no longer a bird, but once he realizes this fact, he is no longer able to fly. Thus, the tragedy

of his life is that he is forever trapped between two worlds, no longer fully human nor fully a bird.

The narrator initially references Peter's departure from home in positive terms. He declares that Peter "escaped from being a human" (Barrie, *Kensington Gardens* 298) by flying out the window when he was just a week old. According to the narrator, all babies want to escape because they miss the freedom of their life as birds. But the narrator also acknowledges this escape as a sort of exile. Peter was able to leave his home by flying out the window because "he entirely forgot that he was now a little boy" and was thus "dead-confident-sure of [his] capacity to do it" (299). Though this departure may be interpreted as a choice, the story stresses that Peter did not consciously decide to leave, but simply forgot that he was now a child with a family. Once he learns that he is no longer a bird, Peter immediately expresses a desire to return to his mother, but he is no longer capable of doing so. The knowledge that he is a boy and not a bird causes him to lose faith in his ability to fly; consequently, he is stuck in Kensington Gardens with no way of returning home. He is eternally trapped in his liminal position.

This may seem like a departure from the power and cocky self-assurance of the Peter Pan from *Peter and Wendy*; however, certain key features of the narratives and of the later Peter's uncertain memories of his past suggest that the stories are linked. These linkages provide the basis for the dueling interpretations of Peter's eternal youth as both choice and inescapable fate. In *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, Peter eventually befriends the fairies and earns two wishes from them. He uses the first to visit his sleeping mother, but he departs again before she wakes up. The narrator explains: "He sat there in two minds. Sometimes he looked longingly at his mother, and sometimes he

looked longingly at the window” (Barrie, *Kennsington Gardens* 319). Peter is torn between his desire to return to his mother and his desire to remain free. He wants to remain with his mother, but he is not ready to give up the freedom and adventure of his life in the gardens. He decides to return to Kensington Gardens for a little while, and then use his second wish to return home again. Peter remains absolutely confident that “his mother would never weary of waiting for him” (320). Thus, although he *chooses* to defer his return; he does not *choose* to remain in his liminal state forever. His intention is merely to enjoy his freedom a bit longer before returning to his family and his life as a boy.

But, because he delays in choosing to return home, Peter’s ability to choose is taken away from him. When he finally decides to return to his mother for good, he finds that he has been locked out and replaced: “the window was closed, and there were iron bars on it, and peering inside he saw his mother sleeping peacefully with her arm round another little boy” (Barrie, *Kensington Gardens* 320-21). Peter later recounts a version of this story in *Peter and Wendy* to dispel Wendy’s “sublime faith in a mother’s love” (Barrie 131). This traumatic incident, which is included in both versions of the text, provides the central conflict for those who interpret Peter’s youth as a choice and those who view it as a tragic fate. This episode would suggest that Peter does not choose to maintain his liminal identity. He does not actually choose to stay a little boy forever. Given the choice, Peter would have returned to his mother, but he was too late. Circumstances force him to remain forever in his liminal position – neither a boy nor a bird, neither truly alive nor dead. At the same time, however, Peter repeatedly asserts throughout *Peter and Wendy* that he does choose to stay a little boy forever. And when

Peter shares this story of his past, the narrator declares, "I am not sure that this was true" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 132), further complicating our reading of the incident. On the one hand, this traumatic origin story would seem to suggest that Peter's choice was taken from him; on the other, the narrator allows for the possibility that Peter is simply inventing this story, perhaps to frighten his companions who keep asserting their eventual desire to leave him and return home.

Both texts also provide evidence that could support the claim that Peter longs to be like other children. In both texts, Peter "plays" at being a normal child - by attempting to play as other children do or by "pretending not to have adventures" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 109). Through imitative play, he expresses his deep desire to be a normal child, and when a little girl tells him that his "ways of playing..are quite, quite wrong" (Barrie, *Kensington Gardens* 310), the knowledge that he is not even able to properly imitate real children upsets him. For Peter, the boring everyday lives of real children are a fantasy. His desire to play as normal children do could demonstrate his deep-seated longing for a normal life. This imitative play may just be another game among his many variations of endless play, or it might be used as evidence that he would choose a different life if he could.

In the same respect, the text also provides evidence that the other children in *Peter and Wendy* cannot really choose to remain children forever. While there is plenty to support the interpretation of critics like Byrd and Hollindale with respect to the children's "choice of turning away from Neverland" (Byrd 57), there is also evidence that suggests that the Darling children do not belong in Neverland. The island itself tries to keep them out. As they are flying towards the island, the children observe that "their

progress had become slow and laboured, exactly as if they were pushing their way through hostile forces” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 85). Pirate canons attempt to blow them out of the sky. Upon her arrival, Wendy is immediately shot down by an arrow. The mermaids repeatedly try to drown her. The island is full of hostile forces that threaten these intruders. While Peter is welcomed as one who belongs and is intrinsically linked to Neverland, the Darlings do not seem to be welcome here. They choose to come with Peter, and they choose to leave after hearing how Peter was unable to return to his mother; however, the island's hostility towards them suggests that they may not have been able to stay forever, even if they had desired. Their departure can be read as a choice or as an inevitability; the text allows for both interpretations.

The Lost Boys, who are most often used as evidence that the children *do* have a choice about whether to stay or leave, actually offer significant evidence to counter the interpretation of free choice. Through oblique references, the narrator makes it very clear that the Peter is the only eternal child on the island; even after they have arrived on the island, children other than Peter do not suddenly stop growing. As the boys grow up, “Peter thins them out” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 89). Whether this reference suggests that he kills them or exiles them (perhaps the pirates are just former lost boys who have grown up), the key point is that Peter must periodically remove older children from his presence. Despite his command, the lost boys keep growing up and need to be replaced with new children. Kincaid sees this as “children betraying [Peter’s] vision, moving up even when they sense what a mistake they are making” (*Child-Loving* 278). The text certainly allows for this reading. But there is also evidence to suggest that the children’s growth is not something they can control. Their growing up is not a conscious betrayal

(though choosing to leave the island arguably is) but rather an inevitable process that they cannot stop even to obey Peter's orders.

Barrie suggests the inevitability of growth through the problem of Slightly's tree. Each child enters the home underground through a particular tree that fits him exactly. Slightly begins to grow too large for his tree, so he whittles his tree to make the entrance large enough without Peter's knowledge. The narrator explains Slightly's growth as the result of drinking too much water (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 141), something that Slightly chooses to do. But, a much more logical explanation is that Slightly is growing up, something that he cannot control. He is now so much larger than the other boys, that Captain Hook, a grown man, is able to use his tree to enter their home. This suggests that Neverland does not stop children from growing. Even the lost boys cannot remain forever young.⁹

Through these and other references, Barrie both floats and retracts the possibility of choice. In reality, no one can choose whether or not to grow up. Growing up is an inevitable part of life. Peter's inability to do so alienates him from the rest of humanity and makes him something not quite human. Barrie's text, however, refuses to make such a clear distinction with respect to the question of aging or in defining Peter's role. In the program notes for the 1908 Paris production, Barrie writes: "Of Peter you must make what you will—perhaps he was a boy who died young and this is how the author perceives his subsequent adventures. Or perhaps he was a boy who was never born at all; a boy whom some people longed for but who never came" (qtd. in McGavock 204).

⁹ The inevitability of growth sparks a similar tragedy in the casting of *Peter Pan*. In *Peter Pan's Postbag*, Pauline Chase describes "a terrifying ceremony" that would occur each year before the annual revival of *Peter Pan*: the child actors are measured to see if they have outgrown their roles, and their services are retained or dismissed accordingly. Chase describes the ceremony as "one of the many tragedies of *Peter Pan*" (qtd. in Birkin 215).

Peter is a boy who is not quite alive; he is an object of longing and a creature filled with a longing to belong, but he is forever isolated from those who truly live.

Border Crossings

Peter's liminal status is only the text's most prevalent example of ambiguity; to some extent, the entire narrative dwells in the realm of "betwixt and between." Through his use of an unreliable narrator and a constantly shifting narrative style, Barrie sets up and undermines a series of expectations. Among these are: an insistence on factual accuracy, the suggestion that the narrator is chronicling events that have already occurred, the narrator's authority over the text, the strict separation between youth and adulthood, the desirability of youth, the expectation of chronological linearity and narrative wholeness, expected conventions of genre, the possibility of eternal youth, the importance of choice, the ideal of childhood innocence, and many others. The text ultimately refuses any stable meaning, and questions the very nature of truth. But one of the most troubling (and overarching) ways in which Barrie's narrative resists certainty is through the relationship between fantasy and reality.

Barrie's text extends the modernist questioning of progress and stability to challenge the very idea of a stable reality. As Tracy Davis observes, "Barrie has proposed that what is pretense is not real; what is imaginary has reality (for some); the imaginary and imagined can be commensurate; the real can be misconstrued; what is real may not be present...and physical matter of imaginary and real consequence can coexist" (65). The complex interplay between fantasy and reality in Barrie's text compels readers to question everything that they are told. Barrie initially establishes a divide between the "real" world and the fantasy one, but he refuses to maintain this barrier. Instead, he

allows elements of magic and nonsense to permeate the domestic London scene. He provides an “ending” with the children’s return home, but complicates this by providing a never-ending cycle of Wendy’s descendants to continue the adventures with Peter in perpetuity. As a result of these narrative ruptures, the text constantly defers meaning and resists closure. Both the text itself and its ultimate meaning are in flux.

In Barrie’s text, Neverland is both a fantasy and a reality – a dreamland and a physical location. Carpenter asserts that “the ‘secondary world’ in *Peter Pan* does not exist except in the children’s imaginations” and insists that “there is no question about it being real” (185). There is certainly evidence to support this claim, not least of which is the island’s name. However, there is also evidence to suggest that Neverland is more than the substance of dreams. The children depart their nursery and are mourned by their parents. Though the duration of their absence is unspecified, the Darling parents’ conversations make clear the fact that the children have been gone for some time. Their physical absence from the nursery, as well as the fact that they bring the lost boys back with them upon their return, suggests that, within the context of the play, Neverland is a real place—a place that exists within the dreams of all children but also a place which some children can visit in reality.

Descriptions of Neverland resist any clear interpretation. Barrie suggests that Neverland is a familiar locale, a place that all children visit in their dreams. The narrator initially compares a map of the island to “a map of a child’s mind, which is not only confused, but keeps going round all the time” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 58). Specifically, he describes the map as a sort of palimpsest, in which different layers of reality and fantasy overlap “and either these are part of the island or they are another map

showing through, and it is all rather confusing” (59). These layers include everything from the savages, gnomes, princes, and coral reefs of the fantasy realm (58) to the more mundane aspects of reality, such as “first day at school...needle-work...verbs that take the dative” and “getting into braces” (59). The Neverland is not a fantasy world that is separate and apart from reality; it is a world upon which everyday reality is overwritten (or perhaps a world that overwrites everyday reality). The boundaries between fantasy and reality become inextricable. All of the various components contribute to the mapping of both the child’s mind and the island. To further emphasize this metaphor of the island as a physical manifestation of the child’s mind, the narrator notes that “the Neverlands vary a good deal” between children, “but on the whole the Neverlands have a family resemblance” (59). This metaphor intrinsically links the island’s makeup to the mind of the individual child who is dreaming of it.

Barrie complicates this vision of Neverland as dream world, however, by allowing the Darling children to actually enter into a physical space called Neverland. Since the three children arrive together, the island must adapt to their conflicting visions. Thus, Wendy’s pet wolf, John’s flamingo, and Michael’s cave are still present, but the differences between Michael’s and John’s respective lagoons are erased and amalgamated into a more generic lagoon (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 84). The children’s individualized homes are replaced with Peter’s home underground. Subtle changes and adaptations smooth over the differences in each of their respective dreamlands so that “they all recognized it at once...as a familiar friend” (84). Barrie’s narrator does not dwell on the distinctions between their individualized Neverlands and the shared one, but

he does repeatedly emphasize the difference between the island of their collective dreams and the physical island.

The children view Neverland not as a place that has always been real, but as something that formerly “had been make-believe” and had subsequently become “real now” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 84). In their first brush with the pirates, the children are nearly blasted by a canon and the narrator reflects: “Thus sharply did the terrified three learn the difference between an island of make-believe and the same island come true” (88). Neverland is, in this respect, a dream come true, without the wholly positive connotations that such a phrase implies. It is an imaginary landscape that has gained physical form. Reversing the process, once the children have returned home, the island reverts back to its former status as “make-believe,” at least for the boys. The children “no longer believed” in the island, in the adventures they shared there, or in their ability to fly (172). The island is a fantasy that temporarily becomes real and then slips back into its status as fantasy. It only has physical substance as long as one is physically present on its shores.

The journey to Neverland is not a boundary crossing from reality to fantasy because Neverland is *both* fantasy and reality. The island exists simultaneously as the elusive stuff of dreams and as a physical location, or as Fox explains: “Neverland partakes of, but exists equally beyond, the real” (“Other Maps” 254). Fox describes the island as a “liminal space between the real and the imaginary” (“Other Maps” 255). This explanation is helpful, but I think Barrie’s vision is even more complex. Neverland does not merely exist as a space between the two worlds, but rather as an overlap. It is not neither; it is both. The narrator emphasizes this duality by insisting that while the

children in the story are able to travel to the island, most people can only visit it in dreams. To see the island during waking hours requires luck, imagination, and concerted mental effort: “If you shut your eyes and are a lucky one, you may see at times a shapeless pool of lovely pale colours suspended in the darkness; then if you squeeze your eyes tighter, the pool begins to take shape, and the colours become so vivid that with another squeeze they must go on fire. But just before they go on fire you see the lagoon” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 111). To see a glimpse of the island requires intense focus and the absence of external stimuli. The narrator asserts that “This is the nearest you ever get to it on the mainland, just one heavenly moment” (111). Yet, at the same time, the boundary between the two worlds is so thin that “in the two minutes before you go to sleep [the Neverland] becomes very nearly real” (59). Neverland is constantly on the verge of breaking through.

Barrie further demonstrates the complex relationship between fantasy and reality in the text by inserting fantastic elements into the “real” world of an English nursery and allowing elements of mundane British life to seep through into Neverland. A stray dog functions as a perfectly admirable nanny for the Darling children. Mr. Darling chooses to live his life in a kennel for several months. Mrs. Darling is able to capture Peter’s shadow by separating it from his body. These elements of the bizarre are certainly out of place in a traditional domestic setting, but their oddity hardly raises a concern. Likewise, the pirates of Neverland do not seem to find it odd that their captain, one of the most fantastic characters in the play and one whose history is deeply interwoven with allusions to other fictional pirates, formerly attended the British boarding school, Eton. Hook’s preoccupation with the “good form” he learned to value at Eton seems to exist within the

play primarily as a way of positioning the pirate as a former occupant of the “real” world of England. In these ways, Barrie emphasizes the integration of the two seemingly disparate realms, which he suggests so brilliantly through his layering of maps. Reality and fantasy are interwoven in this text so that the choice between reality versus fantasy becomes instead an acceptance that they are two parts of a complicated whole.

Barrie’s text repeatedly resists clear boundaries. He blends fantasy and reality, fact and fiction, adulthood and immaturity, heartlessness and innocence, adventure and domesticity, history and story, whimsicality and cynicism, sentiment and satire. He both invokes and critiques the Romantic ideal of childhood through his creation of Peter. His story is for children and adults alike and the constant revisions and multiple iterations of the text suggest a resistance to fixity or stable meaning. Barrie disrupts generic boundaries and self-reflexively calls attention to the manipulations inherent in the narrative act. Both his narrator and his text refuse to occupy a stable position. With Peter, he creates a liminal character that simultaneously enacts and dispels adult fantasies of eternal childhood. Barrie embodies the modernist indeterminacy that Marjorie Perloff describes as “verbal configurations...set up precisely to manifest the arbitrariness of discourse, the impossibility of arriving at ‘the meaning’ even as countless possible meanings present themselves to our attention” (76). His text resists clear interpretation and instead opens itself up to multiple possible interpretations. Through his use of indeterminacy, Barrie reflects many of the anxieties of the modern age and demonstrates a profound engagement with the skepticism and revisionary tactics of literary modernism.

Epilogue

The texts discussed in these pages share a common desire to engage with the complexities, uncertainties, and contradictions of life in modernity. Far from providing an escapist paradise where children are free from the anxieties and troubles of the adult world, these authors provide linguistic, narrative, and thematic explorations of these very problems. Rather than attempting to uphold artificial binaries of classification, they demonstrate that children's literature can be a fruitful site for literary innovation, as Kimberley Reynolds argues brilliantly in *Radical Children's Literature*. A.A. Milne, Gertrude Stein, and J.M. Barrie refuse to compromise style, form, or content in their writing for children. Their children's stories contain the same kinds of experiments with language and narrative form, the same explorations of the permeable boundaries between fantasy and reality, and the same interrogation of conflicting constructions of childhood and identity that grace their writing for adults. Rather than viewing childhood as a world apart, they explore the much more difficult reality of how childhood is both separate from and deeply rooted in adult culture.

Each of these authors challenges and expands contemporary discourses of childhood and incorporates innovations from literary modernism and the psychological, philosophical, and educational debates surrounding the "cult of childhood" at the turn of the century. Each text represents the cultural anxieties of the modernist era through formal experiments, psychological explorations, and a certain measure of indeterminacy. Each author establishes an escapist paradise, only to undermine that narrative idyll by calling attention to its very artifice or by highlighting the persistent problems within this Arcadian fantasy world. Each text ostensibly provides a "happily ever after," but in

varying ways each of these texts works to add a question mark to that conventional closure.

Milne's *Pooh* texts reflect the satirical comic style of his writings for *Punch*. Throughout the ostensibly sentimental narratives, he pokes fun at dominant ideologies of childhood. He acknowledges the foibles and egotism of children, as well as the problems and absurdities of modern society. His experiments with language, narrative, and genre emphasize the permeability of the boundaries between imagination and reality. He lays bare the artifice of his own narrative, while also highlighting the constructed nature of memory itself. Milne's stories contain the fragmentation, self-consciousness, and self-reflexivity that infuse the work of other modernist authors. He encourages multiple interpretations through his conflicting viewpoints and the alternative commentary provided by the illustrations.

Through these various techniques, Milne undermines narrative certainty and highlights the acts of conscious construction and manipulation inherent in the creation of his fantasy. Milne counterpoises his nostalgic Arcadian fantasy with a constant reminder of the two things on which this fantasy depends: the adult's construction and the child's complicity. He concludes that the "boy and his Bear will always be playing" in that enchanted place (*Pooh Corner* 180), but only after informing readers that Christopher Robin is actually leaving childhood behind forever. Even his "happily ever after" is a carefully constructed act of fantasy that does not resonate with the reality of the situation.

Like Milne, Stein maintains her characteristic style in her children's book, relying heavily on her technique of *insistence* and prioritizing sound over meaning. Her text challenges expectations of genre, language, and narrative structure while

representing the isolation, disillusionment, and existential crises of modernity, embodied within a young female protagonist. Stein engages with some of the conventions of children's stories, like "once upon a time" and "happily ever after," but her entire narrative works to interrogate and undermine these conventions. She presents a psychologically complex protagonist who is struggling to come to terms with the modern world. Rose insists upon the process of self-discovery. Refusing to accept conventional wisdom, she chooses instead to find her own truths. While Stein's depiction of Rose reflects a remarkable awareness of current theories of developmental psychology, Stein challenges the supposed universal pattern of child development and explores the impact of gender construction on development.

Stein invokes multiple genres of children's literature only to expose their limitations and to demonstrate how they can negatively influence gender development. Though Rose sets forth to find her own place in the world, her journey of self-discovery comes to an abrupt end when literary convention is imposed. Thus, the "happily ever after" with which her story ends is also a questionable one. She is married and "happy," but the problem that plagued her is unresolved: "the world just went on being round" (*The World Is Round* 67). Stein's narrative foregrounds this uncertainty and circularity. The world's roundness is both the starting point and the ending point of her story: "Once upon a time the world was round" (1)... "and they lived happily ever after and the world just went on being round" (67). The narrative constantly circles around this lack of stability.

Barrie, too, infuses his children's stories with the irony, self-reflexivity, and indeterminacy that characterize much of his adult plays. He presents a very conflicted

vision of childhood; he establishes a fantasy in which eternal youth is both a dream and a curse and an Arcadian paradise where violence and death lurk around every corner. The children who occupy this Arcadian fairyland are "innocent," but there are also jealous, petty, "heartless," and cruel. They seek to escape adult culture, but they also imitate it in their play and replicate its prejudices and power structures. Barrie embraces modernist indeterminacy and presents these contradictions as an inherent part of life. This ambiguity extends to the very form of the narrative, where an ostensibly adult narrator claims to provide "truth" but seems to have some difficulty determining which "truth" he wishes to provide. The supposedly true history of events is presented as a constantly shifting, nonlinear, parodic blend of different stories and different genres.

The unreliable narrator's constant vacillations and self-reflexive commentary challenge the idea of objective truth and problematize the boundaries between fantasy and reality and between imagination and memory. Barrie most directly challenges the idea of "happily ever after" by juxtaposing the Darling family's joyful reunion with the image of Peter, outside the window, looking in "at the one joy from which he must be for ever barred" (*Peter and Wendy* 169). Though Barrie adds a chapter in which Peter continues his adventures with an ever-changing series of Wendy's descendants, it is this image of his eternal isolation that endures in the reader's memory.

Milne, Stein, and Barrie are not alone in infusing children's literature with the experiments and innovations of literary modernism or in recognizing the limitations of conventional narratives of childhood. Juliette Dusinberre and Reynolds have demonstrated that many literary innovations can trace their roots to children's literature. Marah Gubar has detailed how Golden Age children's authors as far back as Julia Ewing

and Lewis Carroll have represented children as "socially saturated beings" and have grappled with questions of agency in childhood (*Artful Dodgers* 4). Children's literature has a long history of pushing boundaries and experimenting with new forms and techniques, but this experimentation seems especially prevalent amidst the cultural changes of the modernist era. Many of the issues discussed in this study can be applied to other children's texts from the era, including but not limited to: Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows*, P.L. Travers' *Mary Poppins* books, Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*, L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* series, John Masefield's *The Midnight Folk*, Oscar Wilde's fairy tales, Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking* adventures, and Edith Nesbit's many works. Even texts as seemingly sentimental as Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* and *Pollyanna Grows Up* can be fruitful sites of investigation when explored through the lens of literary modernism.

Issues of classification have always plagued the study of children's literature. Often, by separating literary works based solely on their intended audience, we overlook some of the fruitful interchanges between children's stories and the literary innovations happening alongside them. By recognizing the arbitrariness of the boundary between children's literature and experimental literature for adults, we can re-contextualize children's texts within the larger movements to which they might belong. By examining narrative innovations across both genres, we can gain a fuller picture of how different authors grapple with narrative indeterminacy, linguistic experimentation, or issues of memory and identity. By studying Henry James' *What Maisie Knew* alongside *Pollyanna*, we could gain a more nuanced understanding of how turn-of-the-century authors conceived the consciousness of a child. An analysis of Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*

in comparison with a children's text that also explores the effects of poverty and immigrant identity on a child, like *Zuska of the Burning Hills* (1952) by Alvena Seckar, can give us a fuller picture of the culture of childhood in modernity. Similarly, by reading children's texts in the context of an author's larger body of work, we can better understand the narrative and thematic experiments with which an author engages.¹⁰ Rather than reading children's literature in isolation, we need to recognize these works as engaging with and reacting to the larger literary, psychological, philosophical, and cultural discussions of their day.

My hope is that this integrated approach can extend to other areas of literary study and help us to better understand the interrelations between children's literature and literature intended for adults. By reexamining children's texts in relationship to adult works that are engaging with similar formal experiments or thematic questions, we can better understand the range of these innovations. This approach can help us to understand the lineage and reach of new literary techniques and genres. A study of magic realism, for example, ought to include the work of Nesbit, Travers, and Masefield. Studies of post-modernism should not exclude *The Stinky Cheese-Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* or other similarly innovative picture books. Modernist studies has begun to embrace some aspects of popular culture, addressing the modernist innovations of comic books or the influence of fairy tales on modernism, but children's literature remains a largely neglected area of literary modernism. By eliminating the hierarchy that places children's literature on a lower rung of the literary ladder, we can open up new fields of inquiry.

¹⁰ The recent collection of essays on J.M. Barrie, *Gateway to the Modern: Resituating J.M. Barrie*, does this brilliantly.

Modernist literature and art has always been largely invested in the culture of childhood. Modernist artists try to recapture "the child's vision"; authors seek to represent the inaccessible consciousness of children; childhood is used as an emblem of the lost innocence of the modern era; childhood becomes a repository for nostalgic visions of the past; the child is the ideal artist; and the list goes on. Many modernist authors valued children highly enough to publish works addressed to this population, often without sanitizing their subject matter or altering their style. E.E. Cummings even published a special collection of poetry for children (*Hiss Whist and Other Poems*) without altering any of the previously published and highly experimental poems. Yet, while studies of the relationship between modernism and childhood sometimes acknowledge works published by modernist authors for children, they almost never acknowledge the modernist elements within popular children's texts.

This segregated approach to the study of children's literature and literary modernism robs both fields. To fully understand the culture of childhood in modernity, to fully understand the influence of childhood on literary modernism, we must broaden our understanding of literary modernism to include works not originally published for adults. Rather than isolating children's literature to its own branch of study, we should investigate the intersections between these fields and take children's literature as seriously as we take adult literature. These two genres share authors, publishers, themes, and linguistic, artistic, and narrative techniques. It is time that they shared literary scholarship as well.

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