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Not Only, But Also: Entwined Modes and the Fantastic in A. A. Milne's Pooh Stories

Niall Nance-Carroll

In *The Pooh Perplex* and *Postmodern Pooh*, Frederick Crews used *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* to parody critical theory. That the Pooh stories were unworthy of serious critique was taken for granted; the theory was trivialized by association. Dismissal of Milne's stories as beneath the dignity of critical analysis has been roundly rejected by scholars of children's literature, who have called attention to the stories' complex layers of framing narratives and argued as to the stories' literary modes. Nevertheless, when literary complexity is identified in the Pooh stories, it is often viewed either as proof that the books are not *really* for children (as if the book could be rendered respectable if only it were saved from the children, much as some people have sought to "save" *Huckleberry Finn* or Lewis Carroll's Alice books by declaring them to be *really* for adults) or else as a stylistic flaw—a failure to properly address the child audience. I argue here that the tangled narrative paths of the Pooh stories are not flaws but features, central to the stories' lasting appeal for children as well as for adults.

As Mike Cadden observes of other classics of children's literature, perceptions of the nature of a story and even its main character may vary not only for different audiences but also for the same reader at different times (287). Milne's construction of multiple possible points of reader identification helps to support such shifting of modes: the Pooh stories may be read as comic or tragic, depending on which character the reader focuses on. Observing the widely divergent assessments of the very nature of the Pooh stories—for instance, the fact that some critics have observed nostalgic tendencies while others have concluded that they are ironic works that make fun of children—this essay will go on to argue that those contrasting viewpoints are not merely a product of differing critical lenses. Rather, the structure of the Pooh stories actively supports multiple modes of reading. Indeed,

the enduring appeal of the Pooh stories may result precisely from interplay of literary modes, a characteristic that Cadden refers to as “entwining.”

Moreover, I would assert, the narrative structure of the Pooh stories offers readers—children as well as adults—a number of potential viewpoints, including that of Pooh (and occasionally the other toys), of Christopher Robin (the character), of Christopher Robin (the listening child), of the narrator, or of a reader fully external to the text. Further, the text’s support for so many and such diverse modes of reading appears to go even deeper than entwinement, venturing into the realm of simultaneity and uncertainty that Tzvetan Todorov identifies as the heart of the fantastic. Todorov explains that the fantastic is a genre that lies between what he terms “the marvelous”—where supernatural events are real—and “the uncanny”—where quotidian explanations emerge for what had seemed to be impossible events. As Todorov emphasizes, the genre of the fantastic is not at all synonymous with fantasy. Rather, the genre of fantasy as it is typically understood would fall into the category that Todorov terms “the marvelous,” which either “end[s] with an acceptance of the supernatural” (52) or in which “supernatural elements provoke no particular reaction either in the characters or in the implicit reader” (54). In turn, the marvelous is defined in contrast to “the uncanny” (44) in which the seemingly supernatural event turns out to be only “the fruit of a deranged imagination (dream, madness, the influence of drugs)” or else a matter of “coincidences, tricks, [or] illusions” (Todorov 45). Describing the fantastic as “located on the frontier” between these two genres, Todorov observes that it “leads a life full of dangers, and may evaporate at any moment” (41).

While Milne’s Pooh stories feature supernatural events, most obviously including the very animation of the toys themselves, some critics have argued that the stories’ extensive system of narrative frames “endangers” that fantasy, dismissing the marvelous elements as childhood imaginings and threatening to collapse the entire text into a sort of “dream” that the child outgrows. Returning to Todorov’s categories, those critics appear to be concerned that the frames may shift the genre of the Pooh stories from the marvelous to the uncanny. Warning that “in his ‘framing’ of the *Pooh* stories” Milne “comes perilously close” to threatening the entire fantasy (115), Peter Hunt blames this narrative peril on “the authorial voice (if not the author himself),” an “evil genius” and “a fantastic creature who is rather difficult to circumvent” (115). From Hunt’s perspective the “intrusive adult voice of the adult narrator” constitutes an authorial error that endangers the “enchantment of the world of the *Pooh* books” (114). Hunt further suggests that Milne “never really adopted the mode” of children’s books, and that the Pooh books somehow succeeded in spite of their author. “As in so many well-loved books (as, perhaps with many well-loved teddy-bears),” Hunt asserts, “the input from the reader or owner outweighs the dubious motives of the creator” (115).

In a similar vein Barbara Wall writes that “the weakest parts of *Winnie-the-Pooh*” result from Milne’s presentation of “a ‘real’ Christopher Robin in a framework story”; Milne’s method of narration, she asserts, is “clumsy” and “certainly slows up the flow of the action” (183–84). Noting a tendency of nineteenth-century writers of children’s literature to provide “strong adult narrator-personalities with which adult readers might identify,” Wall takes Milne’s narrator to task for being anachronistic (19). Wall finds it “ironical that classic status should be accorded to the work of Milne,” who, in her view, “had considerable difficulty in putting children first” (178). “Milne as narrator,” she asserts, is “bedeviled by the spectre of an adult reader who might despise his preoccupation with children,” and is “frequently uneasy and tentative” in *Winnie-the-Pooh* (Wall 181). She observes this tone especially in *When We Were Very Young*, where Milne’s introduction “discloses the embarrassment that he felt at becoming a writer for children” (181) and he appeared to be “defending himself against the charge of writing infantile rhymes for infants by enlisting experienced adult readers, who can share his joke, as collaborators” (182).

Milne’s Pooh stories do shift between techniques, such as direct address, that assume the implied reader needs some help and techniques that assume relatively sophisticated skills. Wall and Hunt both assert that Milne’s intrusive narrative style—and in particular his description of the Hundred Acre Wood as a fictional place that Christopher has a hand in constructing—weakens the Pooh stories. Both critics assume that this framing is not only superfluous to the narrative but also of no interest to child readers. Overlooking the potential for such framing to enhance the books, both critics also suggest that child readers are unable to appreciate the complexity that such techniques can offer.

The “excesses” of Milne’s narrative frame stories, and especially their ambiguities, are very much consistent with Todorov’s definition of the fantastic. Todorov asserts that in the fantastic such frames only seem to promise a clear distinction between the real world and the framed story; in fact they serve to blur those boundaries. Another characteristically fantastic element of the Pooh’s stories is the construction of a character who may serve as a “stand-in” for the reader—a function served by Christopher Robin. “The perception of this implicit reader is given in the text,” notes Todorov, “with the same precision as the movement of the characters” (31). Read through the generic lens of the fantastic, that apparently superfluous narrative frame and “real” Christopher Robin are integral parts of the text precisely because they enable multiple levels of interpretation.

Moreover, the genre of the fantastic is uniquely suited to the transitional content of the Pooh stories. Todorov observes that the fantastic is “an evanescent genre” and in this way is akin to “the classic definition of the *présent*” (42). This evanescence is likewise among the dominant characteristics

attributed to childhood. Paul Wake argues that Milne's ironic "doubling of perspectives" constructs the child "in terms that entail its passage" to adulthood by emphasizing temporality (40). Childhood can exist only in transition; it is not a stable state. From the beginning Christopher Robin is at the margin of the Hundred Acre Wood, and eventually he ventures even further away.

Paula Connolly suggests that while "the presumed focus [of *Winnie-the-Pooh* is] on the young child waiting to be told stories," the shift to focusing on Winnie-the-Pooh is "the ultimate undercutting of his [Christopher Robin's] power in this fantasy world" (44). "Although the descriptions of the normative world are largely relegated to the narrative frame," writes Connolly, "they nonetheless affect the fantasy world created here"; Christopher Robin's increased interaction with the outside world leads to his exit from the Hundred Acre Wood (45). In *The House at Pooh Corner*, Christopher Robin does not even appear in chapters 5 and 8. Not only does he attend school in the mornings he also imaginatively travels to locales outside the forest, such as Africa. Moreover, by the end of the Pooh stories, Christopher Robin the listening child is no longer mentioned, although Milne partially elides this latter change by changing the narrative frame from the first book to the second. In a transformation characteristic of the fantastic, the explicitly fictional Christopher Robin of the stories has, as a character, become more "real" than the Christopher who listens to the stories from the "reality" frame.

The Modes of the Pooh Stories

The Pooh stories have been variously described as occupying one of three literary modes. First, there is the credulous romantic comic mode that Ellen Tremper ascribes to the youngest of readers. In this mode the characters are not the subject of humor, rather they are having adventures with uncertain endings in their idyllic pastoral home of the Hundred Acre Wood. The second, Roger Sale's interpretation, is an ironic comedy in which Pooh and even Christopher Robin are the subjects of laughter and derision by a reading audience who feels itself superior to them. Lastly there is the tragic view of Winnie-the-Pooh, the one that looks back on Christopher Robin's exit from childhood as the site of loss. In this mode, as Robert Hemmings argues, the Pooh stories serve as a nostalgic re-creation of the past. Each of these critics makes a meticulous case for the classification of the stories within a particular mode, and all of their arguments are persuasive. They are not, however, mutually exclusive.

As Cadden has observed, modes may be entwined in ways that satisfy more than one type of addressee. Moreover, these multiple addressees cannot be rigidly subdivided by age, "child readers" versus "adult readers." The same

reader may be hailed by the differing modes at different times according to mood and circumstance, or indeed may be hailed by multiple modes simultaneously. For this reason the entwining of modes is likely to be particularly effective in texts that address periods of profound change, which are likely to arouse a variety of emotions. This is doubly the case for Milne's Pooh stories, which are transitional in cultural context as well as in content. Written during the period between the first and second World Wars, when England, like much of the rest of the world, was undergoing great changes both technologically and socially, the books also address the period of transition from early childhood spent in the home to later childhood spent in school. Both types of shifts—cultural and personal—are likely to inspire mixed feelings of progress, ironic visions of the self in multiple contexts, and nostalgic longing for earlier simplicity. Adaptation to change, whether individual or cultural, is rarely smooth. Instead it proceeds in fits and starts as well as occasional regressions. In the face of such turmoil, the ability to return to a book that is at once both familiar and adaptable to changing mood and circumstance is likely to be especially attractive. Read in one mode, the Pooh stories offer readers a comforting return to a simpler time. In another mode, they allow readers to take pride in their increasing powers and encourage them to move on to future adventures.

*The Case of the Credulous Reader:
The Pooh Stories in the Comic Romantic Mode*

If the reader is positioned alongside Winnie-the-Pooh, as both Tremper and Paula Connolly assert, then the arc of the story is the integration of Pooh and the other animals into a harmonious society. They establish a utopian world in which, as Pooh says, "everyone is all right really" (250). Tremper and Connolly are not mistaken in finding these elements in the Pooh stories. The characters are mostly "types" rather than complex or well-rounded figures. "Milne's characters . . . rarely surprise readers, or each other, with unexpected actions or behavior" (166), explains Anita Wilson, and each of the animals is characterized within a static role (168). These traits are precisely what may make the characters convincing to children. Paul Bloom observes that children are generally inclined to be essentialist, as manifested by their "subtle appreciation for the force of a noun" (16). Bloom relates an anecdote of a four-year-old who insisted "he didn't just hurt me! He hurt other kids, too! He's a *hurter*" (17). For children, consistent action that reaffirms the character's primary interest may convey verisimilitude in the same sense that complex, multifaceted characters convey verisimilitude to adults.

The nearly one-dimensional nature of the Pooh characters also places them firmly into the category of comedy. All of them (except the comparatively uninteresting Christopher Robin) are identified by over-arching character traits; this flatness of character invites many people to describe themselves and others according to characters from the Pooh stories—Pooh is foolish and greedy, Piglet timid, Eeyore melodramatically sad, Tigger hyperactively energetic, and so forth. Northrop Frye writes that “unincremental repetition, the literary imitation of ritual bondage, is funny” (168) and Swann rightly asserts that “Pooh and his friends constitute what Ben Johnson would have called ‘humour’ characters,” which Milne establishes “with brief broad strokes” (91). These static characters offer a sense of stability amid the stories’ shifting levels of narration and focalization, which are not only quite complex but also frankly ambiguous. For instance, Christopher Robin is positioned both inside and outside of the fictional world. Even the Christopher Robin who listens to the stories in the opening does not correspond to the actual child. Barbara Wall observes that while the “‘real’ Christopher Robin, situated in his ‘real’ world” is “distinct from the character in the forest world of the *Pooh* stories,” these distinctions are not maintained in *Winnie-the-Pooh* and “the two frequently overlap” (183). In addition to the Christopher Robin who listens and the Christopher Robin who explores the Hundred Acre Wood, there is also the Christopher Robin who co-authors, albeit to a small degree. In the introduction to *Winnie-the-Pooh*, Christopher Robin visits a bear in the London Zoo. This bear, it is noted, is not quite the titular character because even though “the bear’s name is Winnie . . . the funny thing is that we can’t remember whether Winnie is called after Pooh, or Pooh after Winnie” (Milne, *The World of Pooh* 4). The name Pooh, it is further explained, comes from a swan (Milne, *World* 3) or possibly from the sound of blowing a fly off the nose (22–23). While the multiple interpretations of whether the bear is or is not quite Winnie-the-Pooh and origins of the name do not lead to a crisis of identity, the lack of resolution is indicative of the more open-ended structure of life in the Hundred Acre Wood. Both Pooh and Christopher Robin offer readers a multiplicity of possible identities and roles. Childhood is a place of transition, a particularly malleable time in which many identities may be tested, and the narrative structure of the Pooh stories emphasizes and explores this variety. As character’s homes are often reflective of their identity, the change in the living situation (including Kanga and Roo’s welcoming of Tigger, the building of Eeyore’s house, the movement of Owl into Piglet’s house, and Piglet’s decision to move in with Pooh) emphasizes that the relationships and identities of the characters are not wholly static. Likewise moments that are discrepant with the overall characterization—Eeyore’s “frisking about the forest” with joy at having his tail back, complete with pictures of him

happily admiring his tail from different angles (Milne, *World* 54), Pooh's clever idea to go in Christopher Robin's umbrella (133), Piglet's brave ascent to Owl's letterbox (281–83)—all suggest malleability of identity. Such moments emphasize that essentialist definitions of people, or of oneself, are needlessly limiting and that people are forever in flux. However, such flux is precisely what renders childhood radically, and even tragically, inaccessible to the adult, and thus potentially nostalgic.

Nostalgia and Milne

Connolly writes that “Milne was convinced that childhood created the adult” and believed “that by the time one was an adult, one’s personality had already been formed, one’s future in many ways determined” (109). Milne does not, however, appear to have romanticized his real childhood. As his descriptions of army life indicate, he prized adult life’s pleasures and freedoms. He compares army routine to being “a schoolboy again” who must “say ‘Yes, sir’ and ‘No, sir’ and ‘Please, sir’ and ‘May I, sir?’” which, while it “was no hardship to schoolboys, no hardship to a million men in monotonous employment,” he experienced as “hell itself” because he was “spoilt by good-fortune” (*Autobiography* 249–50). Milne identifies adulthood as preferable to childhood primarily insofar as it affords greater control and autonomy. While there are nostalgic elements in the Pooh stories—and while Milne does recount happy times associated with childhood—some critics emphasize these selectively, interpreting the Pooh stories as defined by nostalgia and implying that sentimental recollections have here overridden the satiric style that characterizes Milne’s other writing.

Svetlana Boym observes that “[n]ostalgia is not always about the past, it can be retrospective but also prospective” and nostalgia “is not always for the *ancien regime* or fallen empire but also for the unrealized dreams of the past and visions of the future that became obsolete” (xvi). The appeal of nostalgia, then, may be based not only on the specifics of a previous age, but also on the promise that the world of that age appeared to hold for the future. What is lost (and nostalgically missed) may not be the pleasure of childhood itself, but rather all of the possibilities of the many adulthoods that still awaited. Boym’s broader conceptualization of nostalgia contrasts sharply with Hemmings’ analysis of the “impossibly sanitized and Edenic time and space” of the Hundred Acre Wood as a construction of childhood founded on repression of sexuality (55). Instead, the nostalgia in Milne’s writings may reflect a greater cultural nostalgia for a prewar era. In this context, childhood’s sunny and idyllic summer takes on the additional metaphoric presence of the “last summer”—the summer of 1914, which “has assumed the status

of a permanent symbol for anything innocently but irrevocably lost" (Fussell 24). Paul Fussell writes that one "index of the prevailing innocence is a curious prophylaxis of language. One could use with security words which a few years later, after the war, would constitute obvious *double entendres*" (23). While Milne's Pooh stories are not technically prewar, Hemmings does acknowledge that Milne's vision may be attributed "to the Victorian and Edwardian cultural movement that embraced the myth of an Arcadian rural England, a pastoral counterpoint to industrialization and modernization" (54).

Distinguishing between explicit and implicit pastoral insets, Andrew Ettin insists that even without a frame story the pastoral is set against "an extensively portrayed unpastoral context" (75) that "suggests knowledge of another way of life which the pastoral has surpassed or prevailed against" (81). Nonetheless, Ettin claims, the pastoral "remains somewhere within, once one has experienced it . . . even when not visible without" (81), the same state described in the final lines of the Pooh stories: "So they went off together. But 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" (Milne, *World* 313–14). A credulous reading of these lines serves as a reassuring reminder that the characters are fixed in time, not subject to change.

Milne's personal statements on the transition from childhood to adulthood suggest a perspective of continuity as opposed to radical break; he appears to hold the mainstream view that formative years help to establish the patterns and personalities that will define adulthood. Milne's attraction to complex narratives, apparent in his willingness to encumber stories with digressions and multiple viewpoints, may be an attempt to access the sort of "pure" or episodic memory that Nicholas Dames recognizes in other early twentieth-century writers including Proust and Joyce, in contrast to the romanticized and simplified forms of nostalgia that Dames finds in the nineteenth-century authors. In his autobiography, Milne evokes a pastoral scene lost forever; describing receiving the news of the death of two soldiers he calls "So-and-so and So-and-so," he writes,

I remembered them, two boys under the apple trees in the little village where I had joined them in billets; we had dined in the garden to the gramophone, and there were peaches which one of them had fetched from Amiens and the war was just a happy picnic to them, the guns rolling so far, far away in the distance that one would never catch up with them. (258)

The clear evocation of the pastoral is interrupted by the presence of the gramophone; this is the recollection of specifics, not the creation of a mythic pastoral landscape forever unchanged. As Ettin observes,

in the most idyllic landscape we are likely to catch a recollection of the world excluded by the pastoral . . . one of the central paradoxes of the pastoral is that those best able to appreciate it and those best able to express their appreciation are not themselves *of* the pastoral world. Even if they once were, they likely are no longer; so the pastoral is almost inevitably defined partly by what it is not, in addition to what it is. (82)

Ettin writes that in “pastoral literature the natural world does not always constitute the highest value; but it is a high value against which all others are measured” (22). This interpretation of the experience of pastoral childhood perhaps best describes the stance implied in the Pooh stories—a world view in which good need not be perfect, and one that matches the imperfect, but well-intentioned and much-beloved, characters that populate the story. Ettin’s claim that “the pastoral impulse toward containment involves holding contraries together in apparent unity” similarly describes that nuanced view (12). The pastoral, Ettin writes, “thrives on implications; it dwells amid nuances and flourishes in the shade” (96). Such focus on “contraries” and “nuance” reflects the same tendency as Cadden’s entwined modes and Todorov’s irresolvable fantastic. The past and the future, the idyllic and the ironic, and the child and the adult are not presented as neatly separable in these paradigms.

Paul Alpers observes that the pastoral is used “to conjure with,” whether sincerely in praise or else “to mean ‘naively idyllic’ and thus to put a curse on the work or author so named” (8). While Ettin places Milne within the category of pastoral writers, he determines Milne to be one of the writers to whom “the child’s attitude towards life seems ideal because it is harmonious within its environment,” asserting that once “Christopher Robin has to spend too much of his day at school . . . something is lost” (139). Ettin’s description may not automatically relegate the work to the “naively idyllic,” but it also refuses the Pooh stories entry to the category of “the ones we find interesting” that Ettin reserves for ironic texts (115). Like the literary modes, however, Ettin’s categories need not be mutually exclusive. Just as Christopher Robin is both in the pastoral setting and listening to the stories simultaneously, so too can a writer acknowledge the draw of the pastoral without being consumed with longing. In his poem “The Supermen,” Milne writes that it is “pleasanter to be an adult” rather than a member of “the Siegfried cult”; that he is “glad that [his] colossal brain won’t take [him] back to school again” and “glad that [he] can write this verse without authority from Nurse” (*Behind the Lines* 48). Far from a strictly pastoral construction of childhood, Milne here underscores childhood’s inherent lack of power, and especially with a lack of reasoning and knowledge, the same deficits that he associates with membership in the Nazi party. While it would be wrong to assume that Milne associates children with fascists, he does identify them both with naïveté and lack of autonomy, traits that he does not find desirable

or admirable. Milne's infantilizing vision of fascists might appear to support the popular idea that he disliked children; Thwaite notes that "[t]he idea of the children's writer who does not like children is a paradox that seems to lodge in people's minds" and that this "is the thing they think they 'know' about him" (216). In fact, Thwaite asserts, Milne's "most characteristic attitude to children," is "fascinated but totally unsentimental" (217). Critics who focus on that unsentimental side of Milne's writing about children often observe that parts of it do not seem to address children at all.

Lerner asserts that "the same [pastoral] work may hover between positive and negative" (21). Likewise, Cadden finds that one need not settle for one mode or the other in a children's book, nor must a single reading dwell completely in one emotional pole; admixture and complexity are often the balancing and rewarding elements in a single text. Milne's work is neither wholly sentimental nor wholly ironic, but such balance does not indicate uncertainty as much as nuance, and reflects the complexity of maturation. Childhood has sometimes been conceived as a linear movement from simplicity to complexity, but the analogy of childhood and adulthood to those two poles is itself overly simplistic.

The Pooh stories are not wholly nostalgic, even though they inspire nostalgia in some readers. The distinction between something that is nostalgic and something that inspires nostalgia is an important one; that something is an object of nostalgia does not imply that it was designed to be that way or that such nostalgia reflects inherent qualities of the item. For instance, Proust's madeleine inspired such a feeling in his narrator but that was reflective of qualities of that narrator, not the cookie. While the experience of reading the Pooh stories as an older child or as an adult may inspire nostalgia, an analysis that focuses solely on nostalgia ignores the other elements in the text and projects that nostalgia onto younger readers. Repeated readings grant a position of greater narrative understanding, which the child audience links to greater power and to a position of adulthood that they wish to emulate. Such repetitions are not a nostalgic re-creation of an initial "innocent" or naïve and unknowing reading, but rather allow even quite young listeners to experience the "superiority" of knowing what comes next. Adult readers may experience nostalgia for an innocent childhood of romantic construction, but children only rarely look back fondly on their younger selves. More often they experience the desire for more power and more adventures that drives them toward adulthood, with all of its freedom, power, and accompanying responsibilities. For the child, the Pooh stories are not nostalgic tales because they portray nothing for which the child is nostalgic. For Milne at the time of writing, these tales reflected a present time and a present place. They were written about his son, for his son, when his son was roughly the age portrayed by

Christopher Robin. At the time they were published they were not nostalgic, and by the time that they would be he often protested that he was finished with them and had little desire to return. Indeed, he quite resented critics who focused on him as a children's author, jokingly explaining that they found evidence because he was "writing about people who were children once" (*Autobiography* 287). While he certainly wrote nostalgically about childhood on occasion (such as when he wrote about his schooling), an overemphasis on nostalgia can obscure the other modes in which the text functions. For readers the stories can function both nostalgically or anti-nostalgically; like so much of enduring literature they encompass a wide range of emotional response to personal and cultural change. While some critical perspectives embrace only one response to that change, the Pooh stories themselves are not so limited, and readings that seek to explain them solely through nostalgia or solely through irony are forever encountering elements (such as the frame stories) that seem excessive or unnecessary.

"Winking over Children's Heads": Double Address and Ironic Comedy

Cadden asserts that Milne is "winking over the heads of children to the adults lined up in the back of the room" (294). As do Wall and Hunt, Cadden here assumes that children are incapable of appreciating the humor in Milne's books. Wall writes that the practice of writing jokes for the adults occurs when "the author . . . deems himself to be intellectually well above the level of his child reader" and will then "make jokes, in the same childish language, over the head of the narratee, implying an adult reader who will appreciate them" (16). While Wall notes that the author may do so "unconsciously," she describes such humor as "clashing" with the level of narration, which suggests that it is inappropriate in a book for children (16). Maria Nikolajeva likewise finds that "while seemingly the events are presented from a child's perspective" often "close readings . . . reveal that the author is indeed using a double (or at best, dual) address" (12). Even dual address—aimed at children and adults simultaneously rather than each in turn—is often deemed inappropriate for children's literature. Wall writes that such address occurs "only in the work of the most self-conscious writers . . . and inevitably detracts from the integrity of the work" (21). The "integrity of a work" here appears to be defined by the exclusion of any and all things adult from children's literature despite their intrusion on children's lives, a prohibition that appears to extend even to acknowledgment of children's own impending maturity. Such a prohibition is not a matter of honoring the children's apparent preferences: Wall notes that "[m]any child readers respond favourably to the sense of security given them by the familiar voice of the explaining, rather patronising, narrator" (18). Here

it is the critics, I would argue, and not the authors, who are seeking to fix children and prevent them from growing up. Sue Walsh observes a tendency in criticism to assume children cannot appreciate irony, despite evidence to the contrary, and argues that this is part of a larger attempt to use “[a]ppeals to the ‘child reader’ . . . to foreclose certain kinds of readings that are thereby produced as ‘adult’ and therefore have no validity in the context of children’s literature” (27). Because irony “requires a notion of language as that which does not necessarily mean what it says” and many constructions of children and their language depend on the assumption that they mean “what they say in all ‘innocence’” (Walsh 33), such a construction relies on defining childhood in oppositional terms to adulthood. However, this dialectic does not necessarily inform the children’s works that it analyzes. The ironic reading relies on the construction of credulous readers that the savvy, ironic readers can distance themselves from. These imagined credulous readers are rubes, and both the author and the reader enjoy seeing them mired in misunderstanding.

The credulous level of the text can be identified with Pooh himself, whose lack of knowledge is often highlighted: “silly old Pooh” (Milne, *World* 146), “silly old bear” (19, 32, 43, 105), “hasn’t [got] much brain” (122, 130), he is “a Bear of Very Little Brain” (195, 244, 312), “a Bear of No Brain at All” (44), “Foolish and Deluded” (44), he “does silly things” (122), he “might do something silly” (130), and Piglet “really had more brain than Pooh” (196). This frequent reference to Pooh’s lack of knowledge and foolish actions allow “the juvenile reader/listener,” as Wilson writes, to “frequently relish the satisfaction of being smarter than Pooh” (167). However, Pooh’s foolishness is so often mentioned that being smarter than Pooh is a rather hollow victory.

Sale writes that the closing lines of *The House at Pooh Corner* are “lies . . . known to be lies, which saves everything” indicating that “Pooh and Christopher Robin do not go away together” and “The Forest is now forever closed except in memory and that is not a sentimental fact” (169). Sale emphasizes that “we,” the reader, must be aware of this falsehood. A reader possessing this information is positioned as savvier than the narrator, reading from a position of analytic privilege and understanding these statements ironically. Sale’s reading of the end of the Pooh stories also asserts a radical break between childhood and adulthood that contradicts the text of the work. Laurence Lerner describes a negative “provincial-mediated” pastoral form (also called the “anti-pastoral”) in which the narrative presence “looks at the country not through the eyes of his wishes” but rather “simply pausing to laugh at rustic boors” (21). Sale’s reading, which asserts that adult enjoyment comes mainly at the expense of the characters, would suggest that the pastoral impulses here are expressed in precisely this anti-pastoral form. If the inhabitants of the Hundred Acre Wood inspired only derisive laughter,

they would indeed be these “rustic boors”; however, such a reading requires overlooking the more sympathetic depictions of the characters, as well as the fact that Christopher Robin is initially presented as a resident, not merely someone passing through.

Ettin, in contrast, claims that far from undermining the pastoral, ironies “are so vital to pastoral literature that one cannot ignore them,” adding that while “not every pastoral text is ironic, . . . the ones we find most interesting are” (115). An ironic reading of Milne's pastoral scenes in the Pooh stories encourages the reader to reject the permanence of the scene and focus on the transience of childhood—and of life. “The pastoral realm,” writes Ettin, “takes its meaning from its vulnerable borders” and in Milne's world these borders start to become more permeable as Christopher Robin spends more time at school (98). Christopher Robin's eventual exit from the pastoral setting reflects that characters are only temporarily “graced with the right to stay in the pastoral world” and may no longer be offered shelter once that time has passed (Ettin 102). Through reading, however, that permeability is also reversible, as readers may imaginatively return to the Hundred Acre Wood.

Walsh observes that critics' constructions of children's understanding often owe more to personal memories and observations than to scientific knowledge of children's cognitive capabilities (26). “Assumed knowledge of the ‘child’: of its needs, its likes, and its linguistic or narrative competence” is often reliant on personal memories of childhood or “experiences gained as a professional who has worked with ‘real’ children” (Walsh 26). “[O]ne of the things known about the ‘child,’ or the ‘child’ masquerading as a plurality of children,” writes Walsh, “is that irony and/or satire is beyond its grasp” (26). While Nikolajeva explains that narratology uses “the concept of point of view . . . both in a literal and transferred sense”—encompassing both the information that is available to the child character and their interpretation of those facts—she goes on to assert that “young readers are mostly just as naïve and inexperienced as the child protagonists” (11). Even in those cases, such as Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*, where “readers are supposed to see through the protagonists' immature perceptions,” Nikolajeva appears doubtful as to whether children actually achieve that level of insight. “A very young child,” she asserts, “will be as confused as Pooh discovering that the character has been following his own tracks” (11). However, Nikolajeva's observation applies only to the initial reading; subsequent readings position the child as already knowing the truth of Pooh and Piglet's situation. In the other chapters that rely upon mistaken identity, the reader is explicitly informed of the truth before the characters are. For example, when Piglet mistakes Pooh for a heffalump, the reader knows that this is just Pooh with his head stuck in a honey jar. This is evident both from the pictures of Pooh

with his head stuck (Milne, *World* 65, 67) and from the descriptions that he “pushed his head right in and began to lick” the last bit of honey from the jar (65) and “all the time Winnie-the-Pooh had been trying to get the honey-jar off his head” (67). Such misunderstandings are made clear for child-readers long before the characters, so that even younger readers are given access to privileged narrative information.

The child readers’ growing appreciation of those asides establishes them as potential members of the privileged “adult” class, lessening anxiety about oncoming adulthood. Describing Christopher Robin’s display of knowledge to Pooh, Sale argues that Christopher displaces “his fear of embarrassment” onto the inhabitants of Hundred Acre Wood, which leads to this “need to rank” with “school boy facts” (168). Sale’s analysis assumes that school is an unpleasant experience. However, although many English schools were places of cruelty and bullying, Milne recalls his own school days as equally—if not even more—idyllic than those days before schooling. While he writes that “only to a child is pure happiness possible,” Milne locates that happiness in school days rather than in the nursery. Describing in detail how “even the most lethargic old gentleman under *The Times* must see that [a rough game played in the gymnasium] was fun,” Milne describes the flying trapeze of his active British schoolboy days as “a prolongation of ecstasy” (26). As was Milne, children in general are acutely attentive to their growing mastery of the world; keeping track of what they can do that younger “babyish” children cannot, they take great pleasure in those accomplishments and contrasts.

Functions of Narrative Complexity

The shifting level of narration that some critics describe as uneven or a sign of Milne’s uneasiness with his audience actually provides a point of identification for at least three distinct audiences—a more credulous young reader or listener whose understanding is often closer to text as focalized through Pooh, a savvier young reader or listener who can experience pride at knowing more than the “silly old bear,” and the adult reader whose enjoyment often involves an imagined return to childhood. The distinction between the former two is significant in that the child reader may appreciate those jokes that make fun of the child listener’s level of understanding while the child listener (whose experience is also adult mediated) may not even perceive these jokes. Adult readers may experience the texts as primarily ironic; making gentle fun of the follies of youth and of age equally, or they may enjoy wholeheartedly the nostalgic recollection of their own childhood, and perhaps of a world (pastoral or Edwardian) free of what they view as present day complication and destruction.

The packing of multiple modes into one book leaves certain traces. For instance, many episodes in the Pooh stories resemble the “gathering-as-pretext” that Gerard Genette identifies in the Proustian scene; they function as “a magnetic pole for all sorts of supplementary information and incidents” and are “almost always inflated, indeed encumbered with digressions of all kinds, retrospectives, anticipation, iterative and descriptive parentheses, didactic interventions by the narrator” (111). This is not to suggest that Milne brings some peculiarly Proustian sensibility to his writing, only that such digressive tendencies lend themselves especially well to the entwining of modes. The complexity of Milne’s multiple levels of storytelling—the frame story, the varied focalization, the stories within stories as imagined by some characters, along with the narrator’s digressions—overshadows what might be seen as a general lack of action. Also akin to what Genette finds in Proust’s writing, the episodes in the Pooh stories are not “dramatic scenes, but rather . . . *typical* or illustrative scenes, where action (even in the very broad sense one must give this term in the Proustian universe) is almost completely obliterated in favor of psychological and social characterization” (111).

Christopher Robin Returns to (or Enters) Reality

Christopher Robin exits the Hundred Acre Wood to enter the normative or “real” world, upholding a tradition in which characters return to reality, coinciding with their increased maturity and affirming the values of adulthood and reality over those of fantasy and childhood. Sarah Gilead observes that the “return-to-reality closure” is so common that “the reader’s interpretive query is disarmed by the satisfaction of formal expectations” (277). In the Pooh stories, however, although Christopher goes forth, the entrance to the Forest remains, like Pooh, explicitly available. Hunt minimizes the forest as “the ephemeral product of the father-son relationship—a game, and a rather patronizingly-played game, at that—and merely a place that Christopher Robin passes through on his way to somewhere else” (115). Gilead asserts that the return to reality at the end of many stories offers reassurance because reality “loyally awaits our return even though we turn from it”; adding, however, that this “cozy view points to reality’s idealized, simplified, fictional status” (288). In the Pooh stories this relationship is inverted; it is the fictional world (and Pooh himself) that will loyally wait for Christopher Robin even when he is one hundred, while reality is left to its own devices. Gilead argues that returning to reality at the end of a narrative relegates childhood “to a mere stage in progress toward adult selfhood” and that such an ending “also confesses the attraction of childhood for adults”; combining the escapism of fantasy with the desire to escape into an idealized childhood (288).

“Socialization plots,” writes Gilead, “tend to present life-process transitions as manageable” and the Pooh stories are primarily stories of socialization (288). Gilead contends that there are “three basic types” of “return-to-reality” framing endings: one “completes a history of psychic growth,” another “rejects or denies the fantasy by misreading it sentimentally and ignoring its subversive force” and disrupts the socialization plot, and still another “reveals, without an assuring sense of mediation, both the seductive force and dangerous potentiality of fantasy” (278). Structures with a return to reality, Gilead asserts, legitimize “the fantasy narrative as a necessary lapse from structured reality,” which “paradoxically supports reality”; but as Gilead notes such endings also simplify fantasy in “a patronizing or sentimental tone” (278).

Gilead observes that Peter Pan, “forgetting the past, is entrapped in an eternal present without emotional or cognitive meaning”; Pooh similarly lacks an ability to understand the emotional import of Christopher Robin’s impending exit (287). In contrast, Christopher Robin recognizes that he is growing beyond the Hundred Acre Wood and so attempts to discuss his departure with Pooh, who cannot understand, especially when Christopher Robin has difficulty articulating his question. In contrast to the dynamic protagonists of their respective stories, Pooh and Peter Pan are static. That stasis requires that they be left behind in the world of fantasy; they cannot join the protagonists in the real world of maturity. The Pooh stories, in contrast to Peter Pan, end at this portal, but the door never closes. If one takes the unironic interpretation of the continued accessibility of Enchanted Place, it may be symbolic of the text itself—a stable point to which one can return.

Conclusion

The claims that the final lines are true or false are both supportable; they are also potentially noncontradictory. Indeed, “a boy and his bear can always be playing,” and Christopher Robin can leave the Hundred Acre Wood entirely. Todorov’s concept of the fantastic offers one model in which these two claims can be held simultaneously. The fantastic is explicitly irresolvable; while in theory one or another reading may be true, in practice the text never definitively privileges one over the other. The other model in which both propositions are true returns to the shifting levels of narration. The frame story has indicated that there are two distinct Christopher Robins within the book (still not including the real Christopher Robin who exists outside of the book). The Christopher Robin that is the subject of the Pooh stories, whose bear can talk and have adventures, is the one that shall always be playing. The Christopher Robin who is the co-author is the character that is leaving the Hundred Acre Wood and will no longer return. Beyond the literary theo-

ries, the combination of modes reflects the complexity of human reactions to change. In this polyvocalic ending, none of the modes is given primacy over the others. Milne, writes Hunt, cuts "the usually larger-than-life elements of fantasy down to smaller-than-life animated toys" and has thus "preserved the power of fantasy and made it accessible to children" (113). The same might be said of Milne's deployment of entwined modes and the narrative techniques of the fantastic. Like the two Christopher Robins, in the Pooh stories the romantic, the ironic, and the nostalgic can exist individually, in harmony, or in tension simultaneously, as best suits the reader and the moment. Many critics trace a path through the Hundred Acre Woods. Nearly all of them mention elements that seem to them superfluous or irrelevant. In fact, those excesses and distractions are traces of other paths, closely entwined, but bound for other conclusions.

The ending's mixture of optimism for the future and sadness at leaving the past reflects an interplay of emotions that is both realistic in terms of individual transition and reflective of the attitudes of multiple audiences. As Cadden asserts, entwinement of modes is not merely a tiered system in which each age interacts with one mode but instead involves balancing these modes and the emotional responses associated with them: entwinement underscores the complexity of the human condition (295). Observing that "mode might be one explanation for the success of certain 'classic' books . . . that appeal to both children and adults" (286), Cadden writes that these books "entwine contrasting modes through two different characters" (293). This entwining and the attending complexity in the books "will reward successive readings" and "match or challenge whatever mood or frame of mind with which we arrive" (Cadden 296). Whereas critics such as Sale and Tremper argue that children's reading of the Pooh stories differs in mode from that of adults, they view it as a shift from the mode of romance to that of comedy because of children's inability to comprehend the humor. However, such a line of analysis is inconsistent with another of their claims—that children identify with Pooh rather than with Christopher Robin. The story of Christopher Robin bears traces of tragedy: he must leave the pastoral paradise of the forest with promises of return that (for critics such as Sale) ring false. Comedy tending toward irony defines Pooh's story. For him there is little change, and despite each character's flaws the society of the Hundred Acre Wood remains intact (although now with the loss of Christopher Robin).

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