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Children's Literature, Volume 35, 2007, pp. 54-79 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.2007.0011>



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A Taste of Nostalgia: Children's Books from the Golden Age—Carroll, Grahame, and Milne

Robert Hemmings

I

Children's books published from the mid-nineteenth century until the first few decades of the twentieth are consumed with nostalgia. In 1962, Roger Lancelyn Green coined a new term for British children's books of this period: "golden age" literature. Humphrey Carpenter follows Green's period definition, stretching the end point from the First World War to include A. A. Milne,¹ whose vision he attributes to the Victorian and Edwardian cultural movement that embraced the myth of an Arcadian rural England, a pastoral counterpoint to industrialization and modernization (210). Like the imperialist discourse with which it was linked, golden age children's literature was founded upon and continues to evoke nostalgia. I wish to draw three key cultural texts from this nostalgically configured period—Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*—and demonstrate how nostalgia, in its particularly sensory embodiment, works to cover over aspects of childhood distasteful to adult sensibilities, with only partial success.

I begin my interrogation of nostalgia in three enduringly popular texts along more specific and pathological lines than have been previously pursued by attending to the medical origins of nostalgia and following the migration of the term into psychoanalysis, empire, and children's literature. The psychological, medical origins of nostalgia can be traced to Johannes Hofer, a young Swiss physician who coined the term in 1688: "Greek in origin . . . *nostos*, return to the native land, and . . . *algos*, signifies suffering or grief" (381). Likening his newly minted disease to home-sickness, Hofer observed that young Swiss nationals on foreign soil were particularly susceptible to this disorder of "an afflicted imagination" (381), which could be incapacitating and potentially fatal if untreated. Svetlana Boym adds about this Age of Enlightenment condition that "the nostalgic had an amazing capacity for remembering sensations, tastes, sounds, smells, the minutiae and trivia of the lost paradise that those who remained home never noticed"

(4). In his reading of Hofer, Jean Starobinski finds proto-psychoanalytic insights in the constellation of symptoms the seventeenth-century physician identifies: the deprivation of and longing for the tastes and smells of thick milk from an Alpine valley, of the traditional breakfast soups that signified no less than “the loss of childhood, of ‘oral satisfactions,’ of motherly coaxing” (87). At its very roots, nostalgia is linked with the trauma of deprivation and loss. By the late eighteenth century, Starobinski argues, the nostalgic yearns not so poignantly to return to the place of one’s childhood—a treatment favored by Hofer—but to childhood itself (94). In other words, nostalgia is a function of the imagination, steeped in temporal and spatial longing, and the illusive object of that longing is childhood.

By the turn of the twentieth century, in the midst of the golden age of children’s literature, hegemonizing pressures of modernizing European society reduced provincial particularisms and local rituals of village life (Starobinski 102), and the pathological theory of nostalgia had faded from medical texts. But the notion of a thwarted desire to return continued in psychoanalytic discourse in Freud’s theory of regression, which is predicated upon an individual’s “return retrogressively” to an earlier stage of development, implying that the nostalgic becomes the neurotic (Freud, *Lectures* 385). As Starobinski has it, “the neurotic regresses within his own history. The village is interiorized” (102–03). The kind of childhood invoked by key texts from the golden age of children’s literature (which coincides fairly closely with the ascendancy of Freudian psychoanalysis) is profoundly nostalgic along these very lines. The interiorized village to which the adult writer, and also the reader, regresses is not only the imaginative space but also the time of the childhood. More specifically, it is not their actual childhood but an impossibly sanitized and Edenic time and space.

This imaginative destination is perfectly invoked by the single illustration within the pages of the first edition of Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* published in 1908 (fig. 1). It depicts a pastoral idyll: fronds of lilies and a bushy-leaved aged tree are the backdrop to a short and gentle waterfall in the center that gently pours into a river leading out to the foreground and the stylized caption which reads, “And a River went out from Eden.” An otter nestles in the reeds on one riverbank, a rat on the other, but the most arresting image of this illustration rests at its center. At the edge of the waterfall, a meter or so above the river, are three naked children, two watching one stretch a hand into the tumbling water—three innocent babes in the woods.

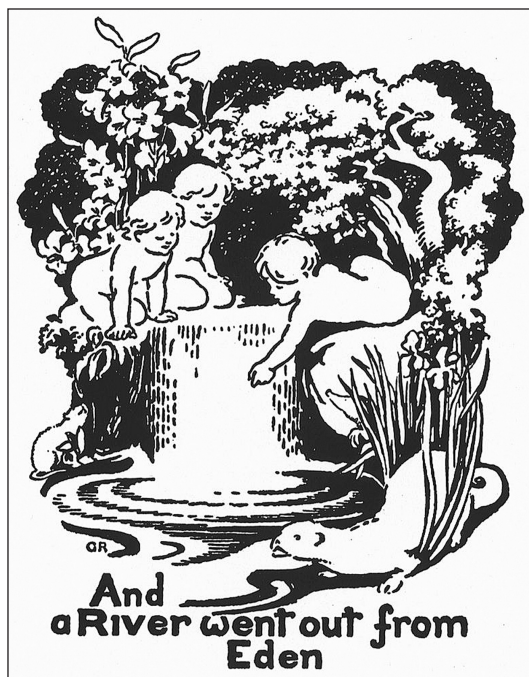


Figure 1. "And a River Went out from Eden," from Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*, illus. Grahame Robertson (London, 1908); rpt. in Kenneth Grahame, *Paths to the River Bank* (London, 1983) 2.

Significantly, the children are genderless and sexless, and represent a version of childhood far removed from an actual child's experience of the world. Sexuality is effaced, wiped clean from this representation, leaving no evidence of, for example, "widdlers" and "bottoms," which so preoccupied Freud's patient known as "Little Hans" in the same year that Grahame's novel was published (Freud, "Little Hans" 170ff). Clearly Robertson's children represent an adult's version of childhood, a sanitized, ordered childhood that deploys tropes of purity and innocence to foster the myth of unsullied origin. As James Kincaid argues about the late Victorian period, this "concocted . . . quality of [childhood] innocence was . . . inculcated and enforced" by adults upon children (72). This myth of innocence figures children as functionaries serving the needs of the adult writer and reader for whom childhood signifies escape from the pressures of a modern, industrialized, pol-

luted, and exploitative adult world. Grahame himself states as much in a blurb he was asked to write for a publisher's catalog:

It is a book of Youth, and so perhaps chiefly *for* Youth, and those who still keep the spirit of youth alive in them: of life, sunshine, running water, woodlands, dusty roads, winter firesides; free of problems, clear of the clash of sex; of life as it might fairly be supposed to be regarded by some of the wise small things, "That glide in grasses and rubble of woody wreck." (*Paths* 19)

Here Grahame conflates childhood² with the innate wisdom of creatures of the natural world and sets them both against problems of adulthood, namely sexuality. Those readers free from "the clash of sex," free from questions about widdlers, are enticed by the caption of Grahame's illustrator and friend Grahame Robertson from Genesis 2:10—"And a River went out from Eden"—to enter a world that can be traced back to a site of primary innocence. Readers are invited to embark upon a journey of, to borrow Linda Austin's phrase, "inchoate nostalgia" (86). And here the exclusion of children from the function of the childhood construct is laid bare.

Children's books from the golden age³ are nostalgic also in their conspicuous construction of childhood as a personal golden age, rich in retrospective longing for a past not as it was, but as it might only have been. This longing is commonly referred to by critics of childhood and children's literature as nostalgia that in Perry Nodelman's words "defines children primarily for the benefit of adults" (Nodelman and Reimer 96).⁴ Nodelman has argued that the nostalgic impulse of such books is imperialist by nature ("Other" 32). The adult is the imperialist who shapes childhood as subjugated "other" with his own values and desires, and anxieties about those desires. This argument has particular purchase in books of the golden age since imperialist values are in many respects the ideological basis for upper-middle-class writers like Carroll, Grahame, and Milne writing during (or just after) the golden age of the British empire.⁵ To see empire as "golden" is at once problematic and nostalgic, nostalgic in a particularly modern—that is to say, contemporary—way. Historian Svetlana Boym writes about nostalgia at the turn of the twenty-first century as it relates to the collapse of empire. While she focuses on the Soviet empire, her take on nostalgia applies equally to the lingering appeal of the British empire: "Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values" (8). The "enchanted

world" of imperial order and clearly defined "borders and values" is as inaccessible as the enchanted world of childhood. Instead, the imperialist adult, whether the writer steeped in values of empire, or the subsequent adult reader mourning lost order, can reconstruct an imagined childhood, shaped by his own values, desires, and anxieties.

As nostalgia migrates to the discourse of empire, intriguing parallels arise. In Renato Rosaldo's articulation of "imperial nostalgia," the imperialist comes to strangely long for the indigenous culture empire has ruined. Or as he puts it more generally, it is "the curious phenomena of people's longing for what they themselves have destroyed" (87). This observation rings true whether one considers the historical case of colonizers mourning the pre-contact colonial cultures they have destroyed, as Rosaldo does, or the psychoanalytic case of the civilizing forces of adulthood retrospectively reshaping childhood experience, and thereby "destroying" it, or at least driving its unruly forces deep into the unconscious, in order to suit its own sense of decorum. Rosaldo implies that adults "feel nostalgic about childhood memories" in order to cover over or obscure with a veil of innocence the turbulent, disturbing recollections of childhood (70). From the social sciences comes an insight with perspicacious application to psychoanalysis. Rosaldo's perspective accords with Freud, who states that these recollections are repressed by adult "civilizing" forces in a child's life. As he puts it in his *Introductory Lectures*, the majority of a child's "experiences and mental impulses" are covered over by an act of forgetting, "which veils our earliest youth from us and makes us strangers to it" (*Lectures* 368). Sexual energies, Freud argues, "have provided the motive for . . . this forgetting, [which] in fact, is an outcome of repression" (369). With psychical repression, or cultural oppression, nostalgia can be deployed to ease one's relation to an unwieldy past. In the realm of imperialist discourse, as in the realm of children's literature, nostalgia functions with ostensible benignity which serves to undercut in the eyes of imperialists, or adults, their own complicity in the violence of domination or repression inherent in the controlling and limiting of the experience of the colonial, or the child.

That the golden age of children's books coincides with the rise of psychoanalysis is not perhaps surprising. I agree with Kenneth Kidd, who claims that it is "productive to treat psychoanalysis and children's literature as discourses that revolve around similar concerns and themes, and which may be mutually constitutive" (110). Both discourses involve a return to childhood, with different goals. Children's literature of the

golden age denies children's desire and appetite by reconstructing an adult version of childhood that attempts, not altogether successfully, to conceal and obscure that desire, while Freudian psychoanalysis uncovers and openly accepts the child's appetite and desire that contribute to psychical disturbances that can impede "normal" development in adult life (Freud, "Little Hans" 299). Children's golden age literature enshrines childhood innocence, while psychoanalysis "insists[s] on the significance of the years of childhood in the origin of certain important phenomena connected with sexual life" (Freud, *Three Essays* 91). Freud understood that his critics would see this insistence as "rob[bing]" childhood of its "innocence" ("Hans" 304). Nostalgia informs both discourses: where children's literature adopts its veiling aspects, Freudian discourse is invested in unveiling and understanding its motivations. Books from the golden age prohibit sexuality in their nostalgic construction of childhood, but desire is irrepressibly present through the attention to acts of consumption.

The loss of innocence in Eden, it bears remembering, is precipitated by an illicit act of consumption conspicuously absent from Robertson's Edenic-inspired illustration. Milton makes much of the forbidden "Fruit Divine" being "inviting to the Taste" (IX.776–77). Inviting tastes and smells, as well as repugnant ones, and the rituals surrounding food and consumption are significant tropes in many children's texts that represent weak points, fissures in the surface of the Edenic construct of childhood through which traumas and anxieties of the fallen adult world shaped by the ideology of empire are threatening to rush in. In the hands of Carroll, Grahame, and Milne, nostalgia is a kind of embellishing veil. It is 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. By focusing on the nostalgic condition specifically through the potentially incapacitating effects of memories of the smells and tastes of food,⁶ I demonstrate that while nostalgia conceals aspects of childhood the adult writer and reader choose to disregard—sexuality, solipsism, and hedonist desire—the same nostalgia also inadvertently betrays anxieties of loss and desire which cannot be acknowledged but cannot be ignored.

II

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is not perhaps an obviously nostalgic text in the generic terms of pastoral idyll; the dream-

scapes of the world underground are more nightmarish than Edenic. Nevertheless, writing in the afterglow of the golden age, William Empson situates this text within a version of pastoral he calls "Child as Swain." In Empson's view, the adult writer Lewis Carroll identifies himself with the child as the writer of traditional pastorals identifies himself with the young country lad, the swain. The fact that a swain is traditionally male and also a lover figure provides an intriguing tension in Empson's simile, but the key point for my purposes is the connection Empson draws between the adult writer and the child he creates, a connection which makes the Alice books deeply nostalgic texts in their construction of childhood. Empson also points to the psychoanalytic possibilities of his reading by claiming that this Carrollian version of pastoral is "more open to neurosis" than traditional pastoral, "more a return into oneself" (254). That Alice is "clear of the clash of sex," in a way that the biographical criticism argues that Charles Dodgson was not,⁷ is ample proof of the purifying essence of the childhood constructed by his nostalgic impulse. The intrepid young Alice encounters many conundrums and confusing, even threatening characters, but her exquisite good breeding, her wilfulness and childish charms are perfectly sufficient to keep the threats at bay. The anxieties of adulthood, satirized through the underground characters' concern with time, legal proceedings, castration ("Off with her head!" [72]), eventually bend to and flee from Alice's will and whims. Alice's phantasmagorical experiences are not Dodgson's childhood experiences; rather her beauty, wit, charm, and sexless purity embody the ideals through which the adult chooses to envision childhood.

The nostalgic vision is, of course, imperfect. Alice's chaotic adventures in Wonderland (and through the Looking-glass) are contained, literally, by the framing poems, as Jennifer Geer convincingly demonstrates, which enwrap the novels with the most conspicuously nostalgic hues. These hues are golden: "golden afternoons" in the poem that opens *Wonderland* (3), and Alice's sister "watching the setting sun" in the closing frame (110). The golden world of these frames reflects the harmony of the dream-vision of childhood imposed upon child readers by the adult narrator (Geer 6), a forced harmony that belies the unruly and threatening events of the narrative the framing devices contain. The threat Alice poses to authority figures embodied in the King, Queen, and Duchess is not a threat to the authority of adults above ground. Because these royals are so imbued with nonsense and the irrationality of their imaginary realms, Alice's rational resistance to their bullying represents both the adult's common sense and the

child's appreciation of this adult mode of thought, even if Alice cannot always grasp its subtleties. In other words, the nostalgic tone so strongly set in the frame is present as well in the characterization of Alice as she wanders through her dream-world adventures.

As the framing poem made clear to contemporary readers, and the myth surrounding the Alice books and their suspiciously fixated creator makes plain to readers in the twenty-first century, the character Alice is based on an actual child Carroll knew, Alice Liddell.⁸ The prominence of this biographical fact obscures the degree to which the character Alice is invested with Carroll's nostalgic vision of his own childhood. His poem "Solitude," written in 1853 when he was twenty-one, already recoiling from the adult world marked by "scorn of men . . . [and] footstep rude" ("Solitude" 254), articulates the strength of his nostalgic desire stirred by his enforced departure from his "homeland":

Ye golden hours of Life's young spring,
Of innocence, of love and truth!
Bright, beyond all imagining,
Thou fairy-dream of youth!

I'd give all wealth that years have piled,
The slow result of Life's decay,
To be once more a little child
For one bright summer-day. (255)

Images of "golden hours," the "fairy dream," and "the bright summer-day" are all echoed prominently in the poem that opens *Wonderland*, and serve to forge a connection between the recreation of the story-telling sessions on that leisurely "golden afternoon" embodied in the Alice books, and Carroll's powerful desire "To be once more a little child."

In the dream-world that Alice enters, actions and events surrounding eating, the smells and tastes of food, reveal rough spots beneath the golden nostalgic veil in which Carroll envelops childhood. In the opening chapter of *Wonderland*, as Alice tumbles down the rabbit hole, the very first Wonderland object she touches is a jar of "Orange Marmalade" (10); her disappointment over its emptiness indicates immediately in the narrative her interest in tasty treats. While in free fall, Alice considers her fate, how deep the earth is, and where she is going, but her mind soon turns to her beloved cat at home, and more particularly, Dinah's tea-time and her interest in eating (milk and mice and bats). The significance of the act of consuming—both eating and

drinking—in Alice’s successful navigation of the Wonderland world is clear in this chapter from her encounter with curiously labelled food. The little bottle labelled “DRINK ME” floods Alice with memories of cautionary tales, moral tales told by adults to instill appropriate behavior in children: “she had never forgotten that, if you drink much from a bottle marked ‘poison,’ it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later” (14). But in the absence of such a warning, Alice “ventured to taste it, and, finding it very nice (it had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffy, and hot buttered toast), she very soon finished it off” (14). I draw attention to the particularities of these tastes (and their attendant smells) and suggest that they are rich with associations of a privileged middle-class Victorian childhood, both Alice Liddell’s and Charles Dodgson’s: exotic fruit, desserts, a roast dripping with holiday associations, comforting toast, candy, nary a vegetable to wrinkle a child’s nose.

However, this pleasing act of consumption produces terrifying consequences. The nostalgic taste of childhood ushers in the traumatizing diminishment of self, as Alice shrinks away and becomes powerless. It is in this panic-inducing state that Alice spots the cake marked “EAT ME,” which she does, with some desperation, after intuiting the logic of the Wonderland world: “if it makes me grow larger, I can reach the key; and if it makes me grow smaller, I can creep under the door: so either way I’ll get into the garden, and I don’t care which happens!” (15). Consuming the currant cake, the whole of it, produces yet more frightening results. Tenniel’s illustration (a starker and more shocking version of Carroll’s own illustration in *Alice’s Adventures Underground*) depicts Alice in wide-eyed terror, her head perched precariously atop a serpentine neck, while the narrative announces her descent into hysterical nonsense as she bids her vanishing feet farewell. Again, the taste of cake, another childhood treat and thread in the nostalgic fabric, produces a plain and alarming symbol of the anxiety of outgrowing childhood. Certainly the wonderful tastes of the “DRINK ME” potion and the “EAT ME” cake have frightening consequences, leaving Alice in a distraught and perplexed state. As she informs the Caterpillar, after consuming these things and changing size so radically, “I’m not myself, you see” (41). But the results of tasting these initially delicious treats pale in comparison to the consequences of nibbling the Caterpillar’s mushroom. After one taste, “she felt a violent blow underneath her chin: it had struck her foot” (46). Her body is hideously distorted: “her chin was pressed so closely against her foot, that there was hardly

room to open her mouth" (46). When she does manage to nibble from the other hand, the results are possibly more nightmarish: "all she could see, when she looked down, was an immense length of neck, which seemed to rise like a stalk out of a sea of green leaves that lay far below her" (47). The hideous metamorphosis is confirmed when a pigeon mistakes her for a serpent. The psycho-sexual associations of the serpent, announcing both the presence of a threatening sexuality and an imminent banishment from a realm of innocence, have been commented upon by many, including Empson. My point is that the act of tasting, of consuming food in the lost world of childhood recreated through nostalgia, like the act of tasting in Eden, reveals the fault lines that threaten the stability of the nostalgic vision.

In fact, consuming dominates Alice's adventures throughout Wonderland; she "always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking" (65). Her encounter with the awesomely hideous Duchess and the Cheshire Cat is set against the backdrop of a peppery soup, the smell of which prompts paroxysms of sneezing from all in the room. Paroxysms of violence erupt from this ill-cooked dish as well, marked by the flying fire irons, saucepans, and crockery, the savage "nursing" of the baby, which metamorphizes into a pig, and a prelude to the repeated threats of axes chopping off heads. The Mad Tea-party, where Alice is compelled by rude hosts to serve herself tea and bread and butter, is dominated by the ill-treated Dormouse's story of children who lived entirely on treacle. A fantasy of the sweet-tooth child, perhaps, but its allure is tempered by the claustrophobic image of the three little treacle-eating sisters trapped at the bottom of a curious well. It is a tale of such implausibility that Alice leaves the party in disgust, a departure facilitated by nibbling on a bit of mushroom. Here treacle, a taste reminiscent of childhood sweets for some, is linked through the hosts of a mad tea party to crazy stories and violent behavior, a potentially angst-ridden confrontation from which Alice is forced to flee.

The parodies of well-known children's verses she shares during her encounter with the Mock Turtle are both part of the nostalgic veil and constitutive of its frays. The earnest moral instruction of Isaac Watts's "The Sluggard" is rich fodder for nonsense. Watts writes:

I passed by his garden, and saw the wild brier
The thorn and the thistle, grow broader and
higher;
The clothes that hang on him are turning to rags;

And his money still wastes, till he starves, or he
begs. (72)

This stanza opens with “I” and its act of observing a garden, a site of potential Edenic harmony, fallen through neglect into a nest of thistle and weeds, which reflects the gardener’s decline from self-sufficiency into penury and starvation. The movement of the senses is from speaker’s sight to the object’s obstructed taste, the sluggard’s starvation or lack of consumption through impoverishment. And the moral of that is, as the Duchess might add, one must tend one’s garden and oneself. Called upon to recite Watts’s cautionary tale, Alice begins:

“I passed by his garden, and marked, with one
eye,
How the Owl and the Panther were sharing a pie:
The Panther took pie-crust, and gravy, and meat,
While the Owl had the dish as its share of the
treat.” (94)

Her befuddled rendition opens accurately enough, and shares the same movement of senses, from speaker’s sight to the object’s (the owl’s) thwarted act of consumption—the eating of the dish rather than the food—but with a difference. For one, the act of observation is disturbed; only a single eye marks the garden. While this garden invokes the possibility of Edenic harmony through the act of incongruously paired beasts sharing the pie, this possibility is disavowed by the disparity between the Panther’s feast and the Owl’s famine. The overall effect of Alice’s recital of childhood verses the Mock Turtle describes as “uncommon nonsense” (93), which removes her further from the spirit of Watts’s moral lessons. The haunting familiarity of the cadence and sound of the verses, which so puzzles Alice and amuses readers aware of the intertext, represents Carroll’s nostalgic impulse to revisit the comforting sounds and images of childhood reading. At the same time, the obsessive focus on bizarre dining partners and strange acts of consumption transmitted through this very same impulse reveals an underlying repressed desire that produces the disharmony, tension, and anxiety with which eating in this vision is freighted.

The conclusion of the novel, following the nonsense trial about stolen food (tarts), shows Alice waking from the dream of her Wonderland adventures, and acquiescing to the authority of her elder sister’s command that she rush in to take her tea. All of the dreams of

tasting and eating, readers might imagine, fuel the child's appetite, as her appetite doubtless fuelled her dreams. Geer argues persuasively about the containment function performed by the narrative frames in Carroll's novels, in this case suggesting that for all the rebellious and chaotic energies unleashed in Wonderland, Alice returns in waking life to reinscribe the moral, ordered codes of behavior dictated by adults (and elders)—that is, to have these codes reinscribed on her (2). The elder sister, having dispatched Alice, falls herself into a reverie, a kind of belated dumb show of Alice's adventures, forging links between phenomena of Wonderland and of "dull reality" (111), then constructs a future scenario in which Alice, as an adult, will look back upon her Wonderland adventure and find it not confounding, disturbing, or threatening, but indicative of the "happy summer days" of childhood. That is, the novel concludes with a neatly prefabricated nostalgic veil that can transform the chaotic and occasionally terrifying adventures of "her own child-life" into an image of "the simple and loving heart of her childhood" (111). Like the adult writer and reader before her, Alice as an adult is expected to view her childhood through idealizing lenses. The strains of this directive are revealed, among other places in this novel, along the rough spots marked by acts of consumption. In this way nostalgia in Carroll operates in accordance with its pathological etymology, whereby a fixation upon the taste, smell, or eating of particular foods associated with one's homeland is symptomatic of an incapacitating, potentially fatal condition. The solitude of adulthood, life's slow decay, exiles Carroll from childhood, his innocent, pure, and comforting home. Attending to the acts of consumption in Carroll's text exposes the retrospective transformation required to produce from "dull reality" the "golden" memories of "innocence, of love and truth," and reveals as well the presence of appetites and energies which threaten to undermine the stability of the reconstructed childhood, exposing conflict, greed, and desire.

III

The nostalgia of *The Wind in the Willows* operates with a similar fixation upon the associations of food and the powerful draw of home. There are, of course, no child characters to focalize the reconstructed childhood experience in Grahame's novel, but animal characters. Perry Nodelman has noted the connection between some common diminutives for children and the animal world: "little lambs," or the

nearly ubiquitous “kids,” now more readily signifying young humans than young goats (Nodelman and Reimer 194). Certainly animal characters and writing for children have a long history dating back at least to Aesop’s Fables, and they were popular as well during the golden age of children’s literature, in Beatrix Potter’s work for example. As Nodelman points out, animal characters, which may wear the clothing of adult human beings, nevertheless “represent the animal-like condition of children,” and do so in ambiguous “ways that allow these characters to express common adult ideas about the nature of childhood” (194). Chief among the intersection of animal characters and childhood is an overriding “concern[] with questions about food” (194). The tension created in this process of identification between the consumer and the consumed, the eater and the eaten, is present in Grahame’s novel, though more obliquely than the tension existing in popular fairy tales, such as the Brothers Grimm’s “Little Red Cap” or “Hansel and Gretel.”

The main animal characters in *The Wind in the Willows* are steeped in notions of home and distanced from links to human food: fricasseed mole, barbequed toad, or steamed rat are not common items in English cuisine. Moreover, any connections with predatory animal behavior are silenced by the repressive appeal to “animal-etiquette,” which Mole understands “forbade any sort of comment on the sudden disappearance of one’s friends at any moment, for any reason or no reason whatever” (*Wind* 9). Fear as well as desire and appetite are channelled and controlled through language. The animals may be carnivores, but as humans are, not as wild beasts; they eat not the carcasses of pigs and cows, but “coldhamcoldbeef” sandwiches (4). Indeed, food is crucial to these characters, and richly tied to the sense of home. The novel opens with Mole’s famous escape from the mundane necessities of spring cleaning to the idyllic world of the River Bank, but readers soon find that this new world is itself redolent of home, only better. There is excitement and novelty for Mole, but his friendship with Rat allows him to participate as well in the rich comforts of home. The River is family to Rat, “and company and food and drink. It’s my world, and I don’t want any other. What it hasn’t got is not worth having, what it doesn’t know is not worth knowing” (5). The Wild Wood which lies beyond is thus unworthy of inquiry, and “animal-etiquette” forbids it. Rat consolidates Mole’s place in this new world through sharing a fine feast from the luncheon basket, and then by inviting him into his cozy home. Rat’s home, featuring “a bright fire in the parlour,” is now Mole’s

sanctuary, his home away from home: The Rat “planted the Mole in an arm-chair in front of [the fire], having fetched down a dressing-gown and slippers for him, and told him river stories till supper-time” (11). Being comforted by coziness, story-telling, and a belly filled by cheery meals may appeal to some children, but it is certainly a carefree state that appeals to an adult writer or reader embroiled in and seeking escape from the toil and struggle of (post)modern industrialized life. While Grahame insists that his “is a book of Youth, and so perhaps chiefly *for* Youth, and those who still keep the spirit of youth alive in them,” the text itself reveals that it is also for those adults who embrace a nostalgic reconstruction of childhood.

The role of consuming in Rat’s domestic sanctuary, like the role of eating in the novel, is to tame evidence of appetite or desire through social ritual. The repression surrounding the animality of the animal characters—that they both eat and are eaten by one another, not to mention that they mate—seeks to contain the Darwinian violence of the natural world in the Wild Woods, where the danger of unknown sights and sounds lurks. Amidst the “malice and hatred” beyond the pale of domestic comforts is the refuge of Mr. Badger’s home, well-equipped to provide asylum to errant animals like Mole and Rat. From the threatening snowstorm, they enter Badger’s hall and hear his invitation: “come into the kitchen. There’s a first-rate fire there and supper and everything” (34). The residual fear from their winter wanderings through the chaotic woods is quickly assuaged through a dose of equal parts coziness and consumption. The warm “fire-lit kitchen . . . seemed a place where heroes could fitly feast after victory, where . . . two or three friends of simple tastes could sit about as they pleased and eat and smoke and talk in comfort and contentment” (35). Again, the appeal to an adult sense of carefree comfort is obvious in the reference to smoking. Badger’s enormous supper sends them to bed fully contented, especially Mole, whose burrowing nature found the underground house “exactly suited [to] him and made him feel at home” (38). The sense of home is further emphasized in the morning with generous servings of “rashers from a side of bacon,” eggs, “fried ham” (39, 41), the day being organized by a breakfast that stretches into luncheon, interrupted only by chatting and dozing. Humphrey Carpenter identifies in this depiction of an Edwardian kitchen “a suggestion of a return to childhood” (162). It is noteworthy that much is made of preparing the ritual meals, and Grahame is precise in his description of the pacifying and contenting pleasures produced by

the meal, but the act of eating itself is typically effaced. There is no indulgence in the savoriness of ham and eggs, no “greed[*y*] ingorg[*ing*] without restraint” (Milton IX.791). Characters are not shown to taste and swallow, to physically consume the food, as Carroll’s Alice does to a variety of disturbing effects. The act of eating is too connected to other appetites that are conspicuously effaced from the novel, appetites not “free of problems,” appetites not “clear of the clash of sex,” appetites that adults would prefer their “little lambs” were not subject to.

Grahame uses “*Dulce Domum*” to refer to the sweet comforts and familiarity of home, an irrepressible appeal that Rat and Mole cannot ignore, no matter how well stocked Badger’s larder and how warm his slippers. Mole accepts that he is an animal of the well-tended landscape, “the tilled field and hedgerow . . . the ploughed furrow,” and he distances himself from “the clash of actual conflict, that went with Nature in the rough” (45), as characterized by the Wild Wood. Here I wish to again emphasize tameness. The novel champions animality and Nature, which are associated with a kind of child-like innocence: not wild but tame, domesticated animals, not rough but cultivated nature. Along the way back to the River Bank, Mole and Rat encounter a human village with all residents “men, women, and children, dogs and cats and all” tucked safely away on a snowy evening, home enjoying the warmth of their fireplaces (46). “The sense of home and the little world within curtained walls—the larger stressful world of outside Nature shut out and forgotten” is most striking, “pulsate[s]” most clearly in a curious scene Mole and Rat observe of home comforts: a bird asleep in its cage, “every wire, perch and appurtenance distinct and recognizable” (47). Outside the window the animals watch as the bird wakes, fluffs its feathers and falls again into repose, and they see cozy comforts. They do not see capture and entrapment. That birdcage is, I think, a significant symbol of the novel’s approach to childhood. Observed fawningly from a distance, the constraints and limitations imposed upon an adult reconstruction of childhood provide a powerful sense of the contentment of a distant temporal home; the wires keep the dangers of nature without at bay. The animals do not remark upon the implications of captivity raised by the cage, but press on yearning for precisely this sense of home.

Neither Grahame nor his animal characters dwell upon this symbolism, and the scene shifts to Mole’s attack of acute nostalgia, which struck “him like an electric shock” (48). Similar to the conflicted symbolic implications of the bird cage, this emphatic “electric shock” offers dis-

tinctly oppositional readings. Mole receives an undeniable summons to return home through what we non-animals can only refer to ineptly as the sense of "smell," so inadequately does this word convey "the whole range of delicate thrills which murmur in the nose of the animal night and day, summoning, warning, inciting, repelling" (50). This thrilling, murmuring animal sense is imbued with a kind of natural wonder that sets Mole and the animal characters apart from the human reader. And yet, this innate super-smell is equated to the industrial world that the River Bankers successfully evade, and the adult readers embracing Grahame's cloistered realm seek also to evade: "an electric shock," and elsewhere it is referred to as a "telegraphic current" (48). The sense of super-smell, at once ingrained in an exclusively animal nature and paradoxically imbued with the technology of industrialization through the vehicle of the similes, is fraught with a tension between escaping to Nature and innocence and the impossibility of escape.

In any case, Mole's super-smell detects "Home!" which compels his return: "with a rush of old memories, how clearly it stood up before him, . . . small and poorly furnished, and yet his, the home he had made for himself, the home he had been so happy to get back to after a day's work" (48). In effect, Mole End is Mole's childhood home, which he had forsaken to participate in the River Bank world, and now, personified, it calls back to him: it "was missing him, and wanted him back, and was telling him so, through his nose" (48). It is not exactly the smell of food associated with home, though food is profoundly connected to "the wafts from his old home [which] pleaded, whispered, conjured and finally claimed him imperiously" (49). Indeed, when he and Rat eventually reach Mole End, Mole's thrill of returning is dulled by the realization that its cozy comforts lack provisions, though with the arrival of field mice guests, Rat orchestrates a supply run and provides for all, "the lately barren board [now] set thick with savoury comforts" (57). With the banquet suitably laid out, Mole and his guests can celebrate his home-coming properly. Again, much is made of the ordering, gathering, and setting out of the foodstuffs, but the act of consuming itself is swiftly passed over. "As they ate, they talked of old times" (58), and very quickly nostalgic reminiscences obtrude upon the tastes and smells of eating, eliding appetite, shutting it carefully away as if in a cage.

Mole's paean to home concludes with him taking stock of the cozy, well-provisioned Mole End, realizing "the special value of some such anchorage in one's existence" (58). Though the "upper world" was part

of a “larger stage” that, like adulthood, would inevitably call him, “it was good to think he had this [home] to come back to, this place which was all his own, these things which were so glad to see him again and could always be counted upon for the same welcome” (58). The nostalgic power of Mole End for Mole resides in a combination of familiarity and permanence. The possessions constituting his home, warmly lit by the firelight, are not merely objects, but “things which had long been unconsciously a part of him” (58); that is, they form part of his own subject, his roots which gladly welcome him back to this space anchored in the temporal past. What connects this welcome, which “could always be counted upon,” to an adult reconstruction of childhood rather than to childhood itself, is the illusion of permanency it relies upon. This illusion insists that the childhood home is always already available, accessible, welcoming, restorative. The only wrinkle of doubt in this nostalgic vision of the childhood home arises with eating. While Mole is alerted to memories of his home through the appeal of a super-potent, pure sense of smell, he returns to a notably depleted larder, a cause of mounting anxiety placated only by Rat’s resourcefulness. A lack of food, an impediment to consumption, stood ready to undermine the positive associations of the home-coming; only after having overseen a bountiful feast can Mole fully embrace the nostalgic illusion.

To clarify, the River Bank, though part of the “upper world,” is not primarily associated with adulthood, but with the pastoral splendors of innocence, and as Grahame figures it, of childhood, “of life, sunshine, running water, woodlands, dusty roads, winter firesides.” Certainly part of the River Bank’s appeal is the plenitude of its larders. As I mentioned above, Mole’s first introduction to this realm features a fabulous picnic luncheon, and during their arduous journey home from Mr. Badger’s, Rat keeps his spirits up by imagining the jolly log fire of his parlour and the fine supper he would eat (49). In many small ways, as well as the overall narrative structure, *The Wind in the Willows* conforms to a prominent construct Perry Nodelman discerns in children’s fiction, the “home/away/home pattern,” in which characters move from a home that is safe but boring to embark upon adventures away which are exciting but dangerous, and return home with a new appreciation of its solidity and safety and its role in shaping subjectivity (Nodelman and Reimer 199–201). This imperative to return is precisely a nostalgic impulse. Pervading Grahame’s novel, this impulse encompasses even the obstinate and peripatetic Toad, whose wanderlust leads him, finally, and with the aid of the River Bankers, back to his ancestral

home. The battle to reclaim Toad Hall from its Wild Wood usurpers takes place, significantly, during a festive banquet in the dining-hall. The rout of the weasels and stoats transforms the abounding provisions of the Great Weasel's birthday into a victory feast to celebrate Toad's successful return, this feast itself a prelude to a formal banquet complete with invitations and a menu carefully overseen by Badger. Again food ("the very best") is integral to the novel's final climactic scene, a ritual acclaiming Toad's return home, but the act of consumption is glossed over as if the depiction of satisfying appetite could disrupt the scrupulously rendered nostalgic vision. And indeed, in the face of the bounty of comforting foodstuffs throughout the novel, and the insistent associations of food with home and the sanctuary of childhood, the persistent evasion of descriptions of tasting and eating evince precisely this sort of disruption.

The call, and smell and taste of home, richly linked to powerful scent-saturated memories of childhood, cannot be resisted. But while the smell of home is embraced by the nostalgic yearning, the actual performance of consumption is persistently obscured, revealing a highly circumscribed view of home, and by implication, of childhood, that offers the adult reader a comforting reconstruction of childhood as sanctuary from the turmoil and appetites of modern life. Biographical criticism of *The Wind in the Willows* constructs the River Bank realm as Grahame's "anti-industrialist escapist fantasy" (P. Green viii), enacting in Peter Green's view an escape from the pressure of his career in the Bank of England and the conflict of an unhappy marriage, or in Humphrey Carpenter's, an escape from London and the pressures of urban life. In Grahame's move to Cookham Dene by the Thames, Carpenter sees the desire to escape to "the setting of the happiest part of his childhood" (153).

Animal characters allow Grahame to reconstruct, and adult readers after him to indulge in, an idyll of childhood innocence without invoking the unruliness of the child. Mole, Rat, and company have preoccupations more in common with middle-aged bachelors untroubled by the pressures and problems of careers and sex than they do with similarly untroubled children. To take up Starobinski's articulation of Freudian regression, the nostalgic figure, Grahame, returns within his own history to the interiorized village of his childhood, not as it was, but as it might only have been: sanitized, ordered, idyllic. And in such an Edenic space, the taste and smell of comforting foods at once infuse the nostalgic vision with fond longing and threaten to disrupt it with

the incursion of traumatic knowledge. Stripped of its civilized rituals and “animal-etiquette,” the underlying carnivorous, quasi-cannibalistic implications (within the narrative logic of the story) of animal eating animal are exposed; appetite and desire lurk ominously.

IV

A. A. Milne was an early champion of *The Wind in the Willows* before it was an established classic, and he later adapted the novel into *Toad of Toad Hall* (1929), a play in which the River Bank is largely excised (Carpenter 195). Nevertheless, by the time Milne creates his own pastoral idyll in *Winnie-the-Pooh* in the mid-1920s, a kind of imperial nostalgia governs his realm. As one critic puts it, “Milne is nostalgic about his childhood, both his own and his country’s, and this nostalgia pervades Hundred Acre Wood” (Kutzer 95). The golden age of the British empire has passed, destroyed by the European imperial acquisitiveness laid bare in the First World War; in a way, Milne looks back to both his own and the childhood spaces of Grahame and Carroll, stabilized and reassuring in their nostalgic reconstruction, with a longing sharpened by the disillusionment of the post-war world.

Milne’s idyll has much in common with Grahame’s River Bank. Pooh’s forest is a setting “of life, sunshine, running water, woodlands,” certainly “clear of the clash of sex,” and superficially “free of problems” from the adult world. It is populated by talking animals, established by the framing narrative as analogues to the child character’s toys. Christopher Robin, like Alice before him, co-exists within the imagined space of the forest, and demonstrates a moral superiority to its denizens, though unlike Alice Christopher Robin’s authority is never questioned, his safety never threatened. Humphrey Carpenter goes so far as to say that Christopher Robin represents the “only true adult in Pooh’s world” (203–04). While it seems to me that this view neglects the narrative frame, in which the first-person narrator is an adult whose authority over Christopher Robin is made clear, Christopher Robin’s authority in Pooh’s forest, similar to an adult’s authority over a child, reveals a reconstruction of childhood that serves the interests of adults, not children. Authority within this reconstruction may be whimsical and nonsensical, but it is always harmonious and benevolent, which is part of Milne’s sanitizing and idealizing vision of childhood.

The nostalgia of *Winnie-the-Pooh* is manifest in its bucolic setting, an escape from a modern industrial world now also reeling from the lin-

gering consequences of the First World War, and in the adult desire to return home to a safely reconstructed childhood. Biographical evidence supports this reading. Looking at his father's character, Christopher Milne remembers that the most powerful feeling registered in this relatively emotionally distant man was nostalgia (146). He believed that his father, through writing, was able to act upon this predominant nostalgia and relive his childhood with Christopher Robin, "a companion with whom he could return there" (159). Echoing Grahame's purchase of Cookham Dene, A. A. Milne bought a Sussex farmhouse near an area where he had lived during a particularly happy period of his childhood, and its enchanted grounds became a model for the enchanted setting of his children's books (Carpenter 201). Regardless of his personal successes at revisiting a peaceful and joyous past, in *Winnie-the-Pooh* Milne has produced an idealized version of that childhood marked out by Pooh's amusing misadventures, in which violence is barred and threats and danger are circumscribed by whimsy.

Unlike Alice in Wonderland, Christopher Robin is not the protagonist in his imagined world; Winnie-the-Pooh and his animal friends cut the narrative path through the Hundred Acre Wood. Closer to Mole, Rat, Badger, and Toad, these animal characters serve also to undermine the idealizing nostalgic vision of the enchanted forest, and reveal the forces of disorder and uneasiness obscured from but still present in the reconstructed childhood. Indeed, even on the surface, Milne admits into his vision qualities discordant with the pure Edenic vision of the River Bank characterized by Robertson's illustration of *The Wind in the Willows*. Eschewing the steadfast camaraderie of the River Bankers, Milne's animals each demonstrate variations on the theme of selfishness: for example, Owl is absorbed by his own (misplaced) sense of cleverness, Piglet by saving his skin, Eeyore by self-pity (Carpenter 202–03). But selfishness is not a threat to Milne's view of childhood, which seems to be broader than Carroll's or Grahame's:

In real life very young children have an artless beauty, an innocent grace, an unstudied abandon of movement, which, taken together, make an appeal to our emotions similar in kind to that made by any other young and artless creatures: kittens, puppies, lambs: but great in degree, for the reason that the beauty of childhood seems in some way to transcend the body. . . . But with this outstanding physical quality there is a natural lack of moral quality, which expresses itself, as Nature always insists on expressing herself, in an egotism entirely ruthless. (*Autobiography* 283)

While Milne expunges morality, he admits ruthless egotism into this quasi-Freudian rendering of childhood. However, the transcendent beauty of the child that connects it to the purity of Nature intimates just what nostalgia can and cannot cover over; it both recasts childhood in a golden glow and reveals strains in the veil where anxiety and distress can erupt.

While Pooh's enchanted forest is not perhaps entirely determined by ruthless egotism, this nostalgic space is nevertheless subject to the impulses of the body. I argue that Milne's idyllic rendering of childhood cannot wholly control precisely what it seeks to contain through the playful appeal of the taste of honey: appetite and desire. Pooh's fixation upon honey, an object at once appealing to both a real bear and a child's sweet tooth, precipitates his first misadventure, seeking out bees, honey's source. Pooh's desire for honey produces a nonsense logic that drives him inexorably on with no thought of return, up with no thought of down. The solution to Pooh being carried away on a balloon is Christopher Robin's gun. Because Pooh is a toy bear, his life is not imperilled by gunfire or by falling from great heights, but the resolution to this misadventure does nevertheless raise the specters of violence and desire. The taste for honey draws Pooh to Rabbit's home, into which he could barely squeeze before eating, and causes his entrapment:

"It all comes," said Rabbit sternly, "of eating too much. I thought at the time," said Rabbit, "only I didn't like to say anything," said Rabbit, "that one of us was eating too much," said Rabbit, "and I knew it wasn't me," he said. (29)

The solution to this dilemma is a tearful, week-long starvation. John Tyerman Williams seizes upon this scene in his *Pooh and the Psychologists*, a book Kenneth Kidd calls in his recent study of psychoanalysis and children's literature "weirdly informative" (114), as evidence of Pooh's Skinnerian-inflected therapeutic approach to eating disorders in which he selflessly provides readers an object lesson in the perils of over-eating (Williams 5–7). If anything about Williams's parodic approach informs my argument, it is his emphasis on the degree of indulgence in Pooh's appetite. It is desire unbridled. Pooh's taste for honey, on the surface so quaint and adorable, persistently threatens to unsettle the harmony of Hundred Acre Wood. Pooh becomes the monstrous Heffalump he sought to capture, terrifying Piglet in the process; he is powerless to stop himself from consuming his own gift to Eeyore. Pooh understands

the polar expedition not as an imperial adventure hearkening back to the pre-war heroes of empire, like Scott and Shackleton, but primarily as an opportunity to consume provisions:

“Oh! Piglet,” said Pooh excitedly, “we’re going on an Expotition, all of us, with things to eat. To discover something.”
“To discover what?” said Piglet anxiously.
“Oh! Just something.” (115)

Flushed from accidentally discovering the North Pole, Pooh sets out on his own for the East Pole, and returns empty-handed: “but he was so tired when he got home that, in the middle of his supper, after he had been eating for little more than half-an-hour, he fell fast asleep in his chair, and slept and slept and slept” (135). His appetite is powerful enough to ward off sleep while he eats and eats for more than thirty minutes, until finally exhaustion swallows him right there at table.

Pooh’s story within the narrative frame of *Winnie-the-Pooh* ends, appropriately enough, with a celebration in his honor, a kind of banquet. Pooh’s first response to hearing of the party involves his taste for sweets: “Will there be those little cake things with pink sugar?” (149). Similar to many scenes in *The Wind in the Willows*, the act of consumption is effaced from the narrative, as the description moves from the arrangement of guests around the long table, to excited (or gloomy in the case of Eeyore) conversation, to “when they had all nearly eaten enough” (155). E. H. Shepard’s illustration of this scene underscores this effacement. In a large, double-page image, he features all the main characters arrayed around the table on mismatched chairs, Rabbit’s clan, surrounding it, looking on with interest. The table is completely bereft of food, the plates before the animals spotless, no crumbs or scraps to be seen. It is as if food is not the point of the party. Superficially, perhaps it is not, as the party is meant to celebrate the new spring and honor Pooh’s bravery with a gift. In the end, however, Pooh reveals the irrepressible presence of the importance of food in the profoundly nostalgic exchange that concludes the narrative. Shepard also depicts this exchange, with the two friends walking away towards the setting sun in the background, their shadows stretching into the foreground. After farewells have been exchanged among partygoers,

Pooh and Piglet walked home thoughtfully together in the golden evening, and for a long time they were silent.

“When you wake up in the morning, Pooh,” said Piglet at last, “what’s the first thing you say to yourself?”

"What's for breakfast?" said Pooh. "What do you say, Piglet?"

"I say, I wonder what's going to happen exciting *today*?" said Piglet.

Pooh nodded thoughtfully.

"It's the same thing," he said. (159–60)

The "golden evening" light casts a harmonic and idealizing glow upon the two figures who contentedly head for the security of home. Beneath this nostalgic glow, Pooh's answers to Piglet's inquiry serve to conflate the taste, smell, and consumption of food with the excitement of adventure. Above all else, and in spite of the limited and sanitized version of childhood that surrounds and energizes his very motivations, Pooh is consumed with appetite and desire. Nostalgia in *Winnie-the-Pooh* is both idealizing and revelatory of the underlying tensions in the dynamic between childhood and adulthood that prompts the idealizing impulse in the first place.

V

In exploring the nostalgic repercussions in three influential "classics" from the golden age of children's literature, I have attempted to demonstrate that the nostalgia implicated in the reconstruction of childhood embodied in these texts has both foreseen and unforeseen implications. While nostalgia is a veil that covers over the unwonted features, sentiments, memories, and desires of childhood, it cannot quite conceal the performative fault line of appetite revealed in a fixation upon food, and food's associations with home and comforts, which threaten to release the disrupting forces of anxiety and desire upon the enchanted harmonic vision. Earlier, I drew attention to the significance of the etymology of nostalgia, its roots in nosological history, by way of emphasizing the underlying compensatory aspect of this impulse, its investment in constructing a distant home as a panacea from present circumstances. From Swiss soldiers, to Victorian, Edwardian, and post-Great War adult writers, to postmodern adult readers who still attend to fetishized objects—"classics"—from a past itself constructed retrospectively and nostalgically as a "golden age," nostalgia embodies a yearning for home. What is consistent for Carroll, Grahame, Milne, and twenty-first-century adult readers is that this home is figured as a particular, idealized sense of childhood, as unconcerned with factual accuracy as Graham Robertson's illustration depicting children in the Garden of Eden.

George Rosen has made the case for nostalgia as “a forgotten psychological disorder,” the symptoms of which were annexed into the territory of psychoanalysis at the end of the nineteenth century (352). And psychoanalysis, itself invested in constructing childhood as the source, a kind of home of subjectivity (Kidd 115), has long been used by scholars to open up children’s literature, from Empson to Rose to Kidd. I believe that *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Wind in the Willows*, and *Winnie-the-Pooh* can open up our understanding of the psychoanalytic ramifications of the nostalgic impulse, as an inclination of containment, a yearning for a temporal home long past: secure, comforting, idyllic, unattainable. Sveltana Boym, writing at the turn of the twenty-first century, describes nostalgia in terms according very closely to my argument:

Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history. (8)

Whether from the perspective of the imperialist looking back to the unity of culture the empire has destroyed, or from the adult looking back to childhood, the “enchanted world[s]” and the “edenic unity of time and space” can be as illusory. Texts from the golden age of children’s books manifest such a longing. Yet at the same time these texts reveal nostalgia to be also an impulse of subterfuge and concealment which cannot help but reveal the energies of appetite and desire that lurk beneath the veil, threatening to disrupt the golden reverie of home through the corporeality of taste, smell, and the act of consumption. Hence food steeped in the nostalgic mode, its taste or smell, anticipates the imminence of the clash of sex, the burdens and problems and anxieties of adulthood. The taste of nostalgic food disrupts the ostensible stability of the idyllic return, and in these texts of the golden age, demonstrates that this return to childhood is not a return at all, but a self-serving, sanitizing reconstruction.

Notes

¹A recent issue of *The Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* dedicated to the golden age of Children’s Literature does not question the parameters or definition of the age (Chaston 2), but features essays which purport to offer new readings of texts with enduring popularity, now deemed classics.

²Grahame's "youth" is for my purposes analogous to childhood, which is itself an amorphous term best understood in opposition to adulthood. Carolyn Steedman offers a useful definition of Victorian childhood which captures also Grahame's "youth": "... a category of dependence, a term that defined certain relationships of powerlessness, submission and bodily inferiority or weakness, before it became descriptive of chronological age" (7).

³The very term "golden age" is itself saturated with nostalgia. As Humphrey Carpenter aptly puts it, "Golden Ages can only be identified in retrospect" (210).

⁴See, for example, Rose 8; Kincaid 228; Honeyman 118; Austin 75; and Nodelman 210.

⁵See Kutzer's study of the connection between the British empire and children's literature in *Empire's Children*.

⁶The connection between consumption and children's books is an intriguing one. Walter Benjamin noted in 1929 that readers often recall reading particularly influential books as children through the metaphor of "devouring" (255). Reading, like eating, "involves a process of absorption" (255). Through "devouring books" avid readers, in Benjamin's estimation, do not acquire formal education or knowledge, but gain personal power and growth (256). To adapt Benjamin's idea to this paper, I submit that whatever growth attained by the young reader is retrofitted from an adult vantage point to suit the notion of personal childhood that adult seeks to reconstruct through his or her nostalgic re-reading of nostalgic children's texts. In any case, the locus of my argument differs from that of Benjamin's; I wish to focus on textual sites of consumption (rather than reading as an act of consumption, or devouring) that reveal fault lines in the nostalgic surface through which trauma threatens to erupt.

⁷See, for example, Morton Cohen's critical biography for an account of Carroll's ongoing struggles with desire.

⁸Katie Roiphe offers a perspective on Dodgson's attachment to Alice Liddell that falls between those critics who condemn Dodgson as a "paedophile" and his ostrich-like defenders who deny the presence of a conflicted desire in his relation to young girls, a denial difficult to uphold given the evidence of his photographs and letters. Roiphe argues that Dodgson resisted acting upon his troubling desires, and she finds nobility, not fault, in these ongoing struggles.

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