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# Idealization and Desire in the Hundred Acre Wood: A.A. Milne and Christopher (Robin)

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IDEALIZATION AND DESIRE IN THE HUNDRED  
ACRE WOOD: A. A. MILNE AND  
CHRISTOPHER (ROBIN)

By

Laura E. Bright

An Honors Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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in

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## Abstract

In *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*, A. A. Milne re-imagines his childhood, and unlike those Golden Age children's authors who came before, his is a *self-conscious* effort to represent the world of the child as emotionally complex and psychologically realistic. The Hundred Acre Wood in Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories represents Arcadian fantasy common to Children's Literature of the Victorian and Edwardian periods in England, but I am arguing that Milne's Arcadian fantasy, on the one hand is a conscious rejection of a home life informed by British boarding school ideology that emphasized violence, emotional repression and the belief that compassion only led to weakness, and on the other hand, an unconscious reproduction of the ideology that underscores it. Milne's stories about Pooh reflect both the conscious side of his Arcadian fantasy and the unconscious side of the reproduction of Victorian child-rearing ideology, which he also reproduced in raising his own son, Christopher.

### **Introduction: The World of A. A. Milne and Winnie-the-Pooh**

In the introduction to his autobiography, Alan Alexander Milne explains why the autobiography is called *It's Too Late Now*. He writes with a tone that I suspect is one of lament, 'It's Too Late Now'...means that heredity and environment make the child, and the child makes the man, and the man makes the writer; so that it is too late now – it was forty years ago – for me to be a different writer. I say this neither regretfully nor complacently, I state it as fact...One writes in a certain sort of way because one is a certain sort of person; one is a certain sort of person because one has led a certain sort of life. (10)

There is a certain sort of sadness with which Milne writes as well. However much he implores the audience that he is not regretful or complacent, the mere mention that “it’s too late now” evokes questions about why that is. Equally important is that while Milne does not state explicitly what “heredity and environment” mean to him, it is clear he sees a connection between the child’s environment and the adult the child becomes, or, in other words, the Edwardian ideology that dominated Milne’s childhood very much determined who he became as an adult. It is this ideology that Milne alludes to with airs of matter-of-factness and latent bitterness when he writes about his childhood. His tone suggests – as does the content of his autobiography – that he had an unhappy childhood and in one way or another he writes about it in his children’s books about Christopher Robin and Winnie-the-Pooh, *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*. In fact, Milne writes in his autobiography that “childhood is not the happiest time of one’s life, but only to a child is pure happiness possible. Afterwards it is tainted with the knowledge that it will not last, and the fear that one will have to pay for it” (27). For Milne then, happiness in childhood is at best fleeting, and at worst, an unfortunate myth.

According to A. A. Milne, he wrote the Winnie-the-Pooh stories because he says he was inspired by his son, Christopher, and the menagerie of stuffed animals that filled his bedroom. Milne published *Winnie-the-Pooh* in 1926 and *House at Pooh Corner* in 1928 toward the end of what literary historians have called the Golden Age of Children's Literature. Children's literature blossomed during this "golden age" and is characterized by what's been called the Arcadian fantasy. According to Humphrey Carpenter in *Secret Gardens: The Golden Age of Children's Literature*, Arcadian fantasy was a way for authors to find "a Good Place, a Secret Garden...an attempt to find something to replace" the world as they experienced it as adults (13).

Unquestionably, the Winnie-the-Pooh books are classics of Children's Literature. They are, on the surface, books that portray the carefree life of Christopher Robin, a boy who lives in the blissful, Arcadian Hundred Acre Wood with Pooh and his community of animal friends. Yet Milne's autobiography implicitly acknowledges that there is more at work here than the author telling the simple story of a boy and his bear. I would argue that the experiences of Christopher Robin in these books are not simply the stories of a boy and his bear, nor do they simply represent the idyllic life of an effeminate Edwardian boy; rather, Milne's Hundred Acre Wood is informed by two distinct and contradictory ideological and psychological tensions that, as Milne suggests in the above passage, informed who he became as a man and a writer. Milne's autobiography indicates clearly that he did not enjoy the same kind of idealistic childhood he attributes to Christopher Robin. In fact, according to Milne, his childhood was filled with neglect and suffering even as his works are filled with idealization and nostalgia for childhood.

In *Secret Gardens*, Carpenter reveals that many of the Golden Age children's authors, including Kenneth Grahame, Beatrix Potter, and J. M. Barrie struggled through difficult, often highly traumatic childhoods. A. A. Milne is no exception; rather, his childhood defined the

period and its child-rearing practices. Trauma in childhood for my argument is best understood in terms of Alice Miller and attachment theory, which “looks at the primary relationships of childhood and takes childhood memories as a necessary starting point for understanding later emotional and psychological problems in the adult” (Zornado 186). Childhood is traumatic when the adult transposes the dominant ideology into/onto the child through pedagogical means which are frequently coercive, violent and alienating. The child in such a situation experiences physical, emotional and psychological distress. According to Richard Wallace, Victorian child-rearing often encouraged beatings and verbal abuse especially when in school. At home the adult’s detachment from the child along with the cultural expectation that boys learn to repress and be “good little English gentlemen” often lead to emotional abandonment and attendant feelings of anxiety and insecurity (Wallace 88-93). According to Victorian child-rearing ideologies, a child’s suffering is necessary and, as Miller says, “for the child’s own good.” Growing up this way the child learns to expect punishment for almost any activity, but especially for directly disobeying the adult’s command. Consequently, the “lesson” that the adult is always right and that the child is a powerless, subjugated being represents the world from which many Arcadian authors seek to escape, only they do it *unconsciously* and reproduce in their children’s fantasies the conditions of cultural and ideological reproduction.

It is neglect and suffering, I would argue, that informs the conscious *and unconscious* motivations for Milne’s writing of the Pooh books. In writing these books for children, he was free to indulge in an idealization of the childhood he never had in response to the neglect and suffering he experienced as a child and that the Pooh books repudiate implicitly. On the other hand, Milne’s childhood was an unsuitable source of positive inspiration, as it was far from ideal, and in fact Milne spent a great amount of energy trying to forget it even as he defended it.

Milne's defense *against* the neglect and suffering he experienced in childhood appears in the Pooh books as unconscious reproductions of childhood trauma not uncommon to the period, and what Humphrey Carpenter identifies as the Romantic notion of "Arcadia" that Victorian and Edwardian writers appealed to in their Children's Literature. I am arguing, then that the Pooh books represent, on the one hand, Milne's conscious desire to idealize childhood and on the other, the unconscious need to compulsively represent the neglect and suffering he experienced as a child in narrative code. The crucial tension between conscious idealization and unconscious reproduction represent a kind of road map to Milne's Edwardian childhood and it surfaces in the representation of the subtle relations of power between Christopher Robin and Winnie-the-Pooh as well as between the anthropomorphized animal community of the Hundred Acre Wood.

Trauma in childhood for my argument is best understood in terms of Alice Miller and attachment theory. In *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, Alice Miller writes, "When we hear that a writer had an unhappy childhood, we frequently attribute his or her artistic achievement to early traumatization" (242). The early traumatization that Alice Miller refers to is what Milne really means when he says "heredity and environment...make the child," a sentiment shared by Miller. She believes trauma is a force that helps to shape the literature of such great writers as Franz Kafka, whose works are directly influenced by a society that abandoned and rejected him. If Kafka had not been abandoned and as a result developed a fear of abandonment, would he have produced the same influential and psychologically informed works as he did? Miller would say no, because "unquestionably, it is scarcely conceivable that someone who is not capable of suffering can produce a great creative work, but the capacity for suffering is not a result of traumatization" (242). Through childhood suffering, Milne was able to produce such classic Children's Literature, though he disguises the childhood represented in the stories as someone

else's, which I would argue is a strong indication of what Alice Miller calls "splitting off" from his memories in order to idealize the past. Yet without Milne's early years of suffering, would there have been a Winnie-the-Pooh or a Christopher Robin? It is impossible to know. Perhaps there would have been Christopher Robin Milne, the author's son, but where would the author's developmental attachment anxiety have originated if not from neglect and suffering in childhood?

Alice Miller maintains that a writer must suffer to some degree in order to produce works as deeply problematic and psychologically real as Kafka's, or even as Milne's, yet being traumatized does not mean one learns how to cope with trauma. Instead, she writes, trauma and suffering "are the result of a very high degree of sensitivity" (242). It is logical to conclude then that traumatization early in life is in large measure responsible for interpolating the adult's personality in terms of the dominant ideology and so the adult writer's work as well. Miller continues,

There was much suffering in the childhood of all great writers *because* they experienced the wounds, humiliations, fear, and feelings of abandonment that are an inevitable part of that period of life much more strongly and intensely than others. By storing up the pain they suffered, by making it an essential part of themselves and of their later imaginative life and then expressing it in transfigured form, they guarantee the survival of their painful feelings. (243)

What Miller argues, then, is that all people suffer in their childhoods but that writers are *writers* because they repress (like we all do) and yet need to express themselves through story. These writers write because they suffer and their writing is an attempt to express the pain they experience and the pain they have forgotten. The kind of suffering Alice Miller writes about

results from *repression* – repression sickens, whereas expression can lead to integration of painful memories – or not, according to Miller.

In Alice Miller's other book about childhood, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*, Miller characterizes the child-rearing ideology that Milne experienced as "poisonous pedagogy" (59). She has specific points that summarize this child-rearing practice, two of which are: "13. Neither parents nor God would survive being offended...16. Parents are creatures free of drives and guilt" (60). This "poisonous pedagogy" is a pedagogy of authority, domination, hierarchy and subjugation. Among the most common, fundamental beliefs adults must teach children according to "poisonous pedagogy" are: "Parents deserve respect simply because they are parents . . . obedience makes a child strong ... [and] tenderness (doting) is harmful" (59). John Vine Milne, A. A. Milne's father, was the headmaster of his boarding school, Henley House, where he taught the school boys and Milne that if they did not do as they were told by their authoritarians, they would end up in Hell. Through such sermons, the boys and Milne learned discipline and to constantly fear and expect punishment, which could only be avoided by obedience. Milne had to endure a home life informed by British boarding school ideology that emphasized emotional repression and detachment, and believed compassion only led to weakness.

Part of Milne's suffering originates in his early detachment from his parents. Milne was the youngest of three children and he reports that he was often neglected, and the attention he believes he should have received instead went to his two older brothers, Barry and Ken. A. A. Milne received "these material expressions of the dominant child-rearing ideology" from his parents, including "the child's nursery, a safe distance from the adult world" (Zornado 104). Milne and his brothers spent much of their childhood in the care of nannies, or governesses,

which created a detached relationship between the children and their parents, but especially Milne and his mother. In his autobiography, he writes, “When I was a child I neither experienced, nor felt the need of, that mother-love of which one reads so much, and over which I am supposed (so mistakenly) to have sentimentalized” (37-38). He does not state explicitly why he does not feel the love he was “supposed” to feel for his mother. However, attachment theorists would say that Milne’s claim “to not need mother-love” is the consequence of his mother’s neglect. Indeed, a mother’s neglect of her child is problematic, particularly during the earliest years of the child’s life.

The child’s too early detachment from the mother is the moment in which a culture’s ideological beliefs – and not human nature – shape human growth and development, for a child separated too soon from her mother will certainly manifest symptoms associated with “difficult” babies, including sleeplessness, colic, frequent infection, eating problems, and so on, all of which later justify even more cultural intervention by the adult in the form of child-rearing pedagogies that encourage parents to expect slave-like obedience from their children. (Zornado 104)

This passage is very telling of the attitude that Victorian England had toward parenting. Children do not start out as “difficult babies”; instead, children grow up with multiple physical and emotional problems precisely because parents physically and emotionally separate themselves from their children. As a result, children learn quickly from this separation about the subject-position of “child” vis-à-vis the “adult.” Children are better seen and not heard, and for many adults of the period, it was even better if children were not seen and not heard. They were relegated to nannies and nurseries, headmasters and boarding schools, and for boys it was often

bully or be bullied. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is an interesting commentary on the Edwardian Boarding School institutional system of relations, among other things.

Milne suggests that part of the reason why his relationship with his mother, Sarah Maria Heginbotham, was detached was her obsession with the Victorian and Edwardian child-rearing ideologies that dominated her period, and so her parenting practices. Milne complains that he abhorred his appearance of curling hair and a lacy collar and longed for the day when he could cut his hair, symbolic of his freedom from childhood. Milne continues that his mother "had the Victorian woman's complete faith in the rights of a father. It was he who was bringing us up" (27). Even though Milne's father, John Vine Milne, was the authoritarian father (and headmaster!) in the family, Milne was more inclined to be closer to him because his mother felt that it was not her place to interfere with the ideologically driven notion that it was the father's responsibility to raise and to punish children. At the same time, though, Milne writes that "when I formed the opinion that, even if Father knew everything, he knew most of it wrong, it was with my mother that I was happier. She didn't argue; she didn't drive the moral home. She was simple; she was wise; she was affectionate. She was restfully aloof" (38). Here, Milne has contradicted himself. The unconscious part of him was attracted to his father's stern and often daunting lessons about God and morality, but the conscious part of him also yearned for escape from his father's strict instruction that instilled fear and for the freedom of his mother's simplicity and affection.

Conversely, even though Milne lived a detached existence from his parents, he explains in his autobiography that his father, John Vine Milne, called "J. V." by the school boys, "was the best man I have ever known, by which I mean the most truly good, the most completely to be trusted, the most incapable of wrong. He differed from our conception of God only because he

was shy, which one imagined God not to be, and was funny, which one knew God was not” (40). While Milne describes his father as a religious man but does not equate him with God, he seems to revere him as such. And being a God-like figure, his father had all the responsibilities and rights of God to punish his children. Part of Alice Miller’s “poisonous pedagogy” in *For Your Own Good* that succinctly characterizes Victorian and Edwardian childhood is that “neither parents nor God would survive being offended” (60). Milne makes it clear that his father would not tolerate insubordination in his school and would punish and, at times, humiliate the boys. Brutality and embarrassment were widely accepted practices in Victorian England boarding schools; in fact, Stephen Kline writes in “Out of the Garden” that brutality “was justified on the grounds that it was necessary to discipline the recalcitrant learner” (50). Kline’s sentiment matches that of Alice Miller: the psychological (and sometimes physical) damage that parents transpose onto their children is for the children’s own good. In his autobiography, Milne’s father is the one “who told us [Barry, Ken and I] about God” (38), which indicates that the word of God came directly from John Vine Milne. Yet, even though J. V. was an authority figure, even God-like, he also had to be subordinate to his own authority figure, in this case God, who gave parents the right to punish their children.

In *Child-Loving*, James Kincaid writes about God’s want for adults to punish children. He cites a “penny history” called “The Rod” to provide evidence that during the Victorian period, more than just adults raising children by correcting them, God was the one responsible for children’s punishments. In “The Rod,” Mrs. Rowland explains that punishment is done “to make his people better,” so “just like God, adults wish to make children better, but it isn’t easy: ‘O how much punishment it sometimes takes to wean us from our sins!’” (250). Kincaid’s example shows that even when adults are punishing/physically dominating children, they are

being psychologically dominated by God. Parents' powers to subjugate and punish their children are bestowed on them by God, which makes the parents instruments of God's will. Victorian child-rearing ideology then was deeply rooted in obedience and subordination to God, which consequently parents taught and transposed onto their children through punishment.

Moreover, the idea that parents of the Victorian and Edwardian eras punish their children because it is willed by God is the very definition of Miller's "poisonous pedagogy." In *For Your Own Good*, she states, "It is also a part of 'poisonous pedagogy' to impart to the child from the beginning false information and beliefs that have been passed on from generation to generation and dutifully accepted by the young even though they are not only unproven but are demonstrably false" (59). In a way, the parents' right to punish as directed by God has been "passed on from generation to generation," as the directive from God is instilled in the parents who in turn carry out that directive. The parents make their children believe through "laying traps, lying, duplicity, subterfuge, manipulation, 'scare' tactics, withdrawal of love, isolation, distrust, humiliating and disgracing the child, scorn, ridicule, and coercion even to the point of torture" (Miller 59) that the punishment they receive is for their own good.

Alice Miller in *For Your Own Good* cites Christoph Meckel, who recalls his punishment as a child, and his recollection reflects some of the same attitudes that adults shared during the Victorian period:

Punishment followed on a grand scale. For ten days, an unconscionable length of time, my father blessed the palms of his child's outstretched, four-year-old hands with a sharp switch. Seven strokes a day on each hand: that makes one hundred forty strokes and then some. This put an end to the child's innocence. Whatever it was that happened in Paradise involving Adam, Eve, Lilith, the serpent, and the

apple, the well-deserved Biblical thunderbolt of prehistoric times, the roar of the Almighty and His pointed finger signifying expulsion – I know nothing about all that. It was my father who drove me out of Paradise. (3)

In his account, Meckel likens his father to God and himself to Adam, Eve, and Lilith, who are God's children. Eve's disobedience to God led to expulsion from Paradise, just as Meckel's disobedience led to his father striking his hands with a switch. What is missing from his recollection is what he was being punished for. It seems that his father was punishing him preemptively. In a sense, Meckel's punishments were previews of what was to come if he actually disobeyed his father. Even when Meckel was punished for wrongdoing, he probably didn't know what he was doing was wrong. From the descriptions of his father's punishments, that they were "blessings" and "well-deserved," it seems that he is partially giving credit to his father for raising him this way. He may ardently believe that his father beat him for his own good, and for the father to justify his actions, he looks to God, who prescribed punishment for the assurance of morality and obedience.

However, A. A. Milne rejected his father's Christianity as an adult and instead focused on the idea he learned as a child that education is of the highest priority, on par with what another might say about the importance of faith in Christianity. Carpenter writes, "though A. A. Milne rejected conventional belief that in God, he was very much prepared to cast human beings in God-like roles" (191). In fact, in his books, Milne replaces his religious liberal upbringing with a childhood of play and education, both of which are a rejection of Milne's childhood as well as a reproduction of his strict instruction in academics.

Though I am arguing that Milne's *Hundred Acre Wood* is a conscious Arcadian fantasy and should be understood as a deliberate rejection of "poisonous pedagogy," at the same time

Milne is subject to the prevailing ideology of his era. Milne grew up during the Edwardian age, a period that was informed by still extant notions of the Victorian “cult of the child,” represented in Milne’s life as the Edwardian “beautiful child” myth. It was fashionable for parents to raise their sons to look like Little Lord Fauntleroy, a character made popular by Frances Hodgson Burnett in a novel of the same name (1886). Milne reports that his mother encouraged him to lisp as a boy and styled his fair hair to curl on his shoulders. Milne writes in his autobiography that his father “conceded her [his mother] the Little Lord Fauntleroy make-up (for I suppose it was she who liked it) and did his best to nullify its effect. We were to be ‘manly little fellows’ ...and manly little fellows we were” (27). It seems clear from this story that Milne’s mother narcissized Milne; that is, she turned him into a version of the child *she* needed, informed as it was by popular Edwardian child-rearing ideology.

On the one hand, Milne’s mother wanted her sons to look like Little Lord Fauntleroy, while on the other, Milne’s father wanted his sons to be “manly little fellows” through any means he believed were right. Both parents in their own way objectified and narcissized their son, betrayed his needs for their own and in the process left Milne with a profound sense of isolation, a pervading sadness, a sense of abandonment, and not a little anger at the past. Finally, Milne’s response to the Pooh stories in the end was to distance himself from them for they were, as he writes in his autobiography, “just children’s literature.” All of this might best describe the “heredity and environment” that shaped A. A. Milne’s adult personality and his life as a writer. “Everything not fully suffered, not fully resolved, comes again,” writes Hermann Hesse. It is no wonder, then, that Milne subjected his son, Christopher Robin, to the same childhood he once had and narcissized himself and his own son in his books, *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*, rejections and celebrations of the childhood he had and wished he did not have.

Kuznets writes about the world of Milne's upbringing and helps to explain the emotional dilemma children often found themselves in during the Edwardian Period. She writes that, though

it may conflict with desires to leave children at liberty to find their own way or, conversely, to train them for later life, most intellectuals in this society put a high value on the imagination, animistic or otherwise, and nostalgically mourn its disappearance in adult life. This attitude seems to stem from the late nineteenth century, when people who perhaps had little contact with children themselves were inclined to idealize the differences between childhood and adulthood and to internalize a view of childhood promulgated by the Romantic poets. (45)

The type of nineteenth-century childhood Kuznets describes here is precisely the one that Milne experienced. Milne's parents had little contact with him because he and his brothers spent most of their childhoods with their nannies. Milne exemplifies his relationship with his father in his Pooh books (mostly *The House at Pooh Corner*) through references to Christopher Robin's education and also reproduces the relationship he had with his mother through the only mother-figure in the stories, Kanga.

Since Milne's relationship with his parents, particularly his mother, was strained, it makes sense that, coinciding with Humphrey Carpenter's sentiment that "[Golden Age writers'] search for an Arcadia, a Good Place, a Secret Garden, was to a very large extent an attempt to find something to replace" the world as they had experienced it (13), later on in life Milne would also find something to replace the emotional attachment he sought as a child.

Milne's mother, Sarah Maria (Heginbotham) Milne, was a woman of her time, and her parenting style was dominated by the ideology of the Victorian era. Alice Miller writes in *For*

*Your Own Good,*

People who were raised according to the principles of “poisonous pedagogy” suffer particular anguish at the thought that they may not have been perfect parents, because they owe it to their internalized parents to have made no mistakes...They will insist emphatically that duty, obedience, and suppression of feelings are portals to a good and honorable life and that we become adults only by learning to keep a stiff upper lip; they will find it necessary to ward off all knowledge about the world of their early childhood experiences. (272)

Milne’s mother was only raising her son to dress like Little Lord Fauntleroy because she thought that this was the right thing to do, and ultimately, she was the mother and was therefore right.

Milne, however, felt no love for his mother, due to her insistence that he dress as he did and that she emotionally deserted him by placing him in the care of nannies. Children of the Victorian era were “taught implicitly and explicitly that [their] inherent biological reality was incomplete and inadequate and only the adult – armed with the material expressions of the dominant child-rearing ideology – might complete what nature had left undone” (Zornado 104). In accordance with Alice Miller’s “poisonous pedagogy,” the parents of the Victorian era believed it was their natural right to fill in the gaps of their developing children with material objects, like toys, which according to D. W. Winnicott would serve as their transition into a world of self versus other.

Instead of being emotionally available for their children, parents would ship their children off to nurseries where nannies would care for them. Such parenting would be deemed as “detachment parenting,” which “encourages the child to repress his own emotional needs in favor of the adult, who ‘knows better,’ and so believes that whatever the child experiences emotionally need not be a real concern to the adult...[and] is chronically concerned about

‘spoiling’ the child” (Zornado 187). “Poisonous pedagogy” is all about the adult being in the powerful position of being right and the child being wrong; it is no wonder then that the adult would ignore the emotional needs of the child and instead fill those needs with material replacements, such as a crib, a nursery, and a nanny. Each replacement eliminates the obligation of the mother to fulfill her child’s emotional, physical, and biological needs. Milne’s mother prescribed to such parenting, which was another source of his own emotional detachment from her.

### **Parental Power and Transition in *Winnie-the-Pooh***

*Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928) are examples of Children’s Literature that are difficult to classify either as novels or as collections of short stories. Since both “books” contain the same characters (Christopher Robin, Pooh, Rabbit, Piglet, Eeyore, Owl, Kanga, Roo, and Tigger, who is introduced in *The House at Pooh Corner*), it would seem that *The House at Pooh Corner* is a sequel or companion to *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Furthermore, the books are divided into chapters, which would suggest that they are indeed children’s novels. As such, the second book, *The House at Pooh Corner*, represents the progression – but we cannot call it growth – of key characters from the first book. There are significant changes in the portrayals of Winnie-the-Pooh and Christopher Robin, both of whom occupy the central space of the books. In this chapter, I will focus on the relationship of Christopher Robin and Pooh in *Winnie-the-Pooh* and how that relationship functions. In the second chapter, I will discuss the progression of the relationships between and among the animals of the Hundred Acre Wood in *The House at Pooh Corner* which finally culminates in an eerie immortalization of Christopher Robin and Winnie-the-Pooh.

While consciously repressing the memories of emotional neglect and detachment from his parents that he suffered as a child, in the Pooh books Milne creates a paradise, (seemingly) free of adults and where the child is the center of the world. This paradise, or Arcadia, is the Hundred Acre Wood, home to Christopher Robin and his animal friends. They are playthings taken from Milne's life, the stuffed animals that filled his son's nursery. While the animals appear to be stuffed at first glance, especially when readers are introduced to Winnie-the-Pooh in "Chapter I: We Are Introduced to Winnie-the-Pooh and Some Bees, and the Stories Begin," they are far from stuffed and imaginary. In writing about Christopher Robin and his animal friends, Milne creates a re-imagined childhood for himself, a childhood that has attachment to meaningful objects, which replace his parents to whom Milne had little emotional attachment.

In *When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animation, Metamorphosis, and Development*, Lois Rostow Kuznets documents that in the field of play theory, two commentators, Brian Sutton-Smith and David Cohen, "note the seemingly erratic nature of the study of children's play and playthings, and they blame the lack of systematic progress on a lingering prejudice against play and playthings as serious subjects in the field of psychology" (41). Like *Children's Literature*, play and playthings are subjects lacking in critical examination, since play and *Children's Literature* are for children only and they do not deserve recognition beyond such terms. Milne's literature for children, however, transcends being only for children because he uses the "stuffed animals" to re-imagine his childhood in his son's image, therefore welcoming the critical eyes of adult interpretation and analysis. In this way, the animals are indeed a central part of the Arcadia that Milne builds as an act of repression even as it is an act of idealization.

Upon opening *Winnie-the-Pooh*, readers see a drawing of a little boy and his stuffed bear coming down the stairs: these are renderings of the real life Christopher Robin, Milne's son, and

his bear, Pooh, as illustrated by Ernest H. Shepard. The first couple of lines establish the hierarchical relationship of the boy to Pooh and by extension the other “stuffed animals”: “Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it” (Milne 7). Already, readers know that the boy holds the power in the relationship, since he drags the bear behind him, without a thought about the physical or emotional scarring that could result from being dragged down the stairs on one’s head. Since Milne makes it clear that Pooh has the intellectual capacity for thinking and reasoning, Pooh has become more than a stuffed animal. In fact, Pooh has become an anthropomorphized being capable of feeling emotion and pain.

In accordance with my claim that Milne rejects his Victorian/Edwardian upbringing by creating an imaginary or idealized childhood that celebrates Arcadia, a world where adults are non-existent and children are free to explore, it would be logical for Milne to designate Christopher Robin’s character as himself. As such, Christopher Robin is a child in the sense that he is egocentric and has not fully registered the existence of others (in this scenario, Pooh as a rational, feeling being) outside himself. Yet, Christopher Robin could also be considered playing the adult role as well because of the power he has over the smaller Pooh. In *For Your Own Good*, Alice Miller makes the case that “the conviction that parents are always right and that every act of cruelty, whether conscious or unconscious, is an expression of their love is so deeply rooted in human being because it is based on the process of internalization that takes place during the first months of life” (5). Christopher Robin’s action of dragging Pooh down the stairs on his head is unconsciously cruel, but Pooh does not seem to mind since “it is, as far as he

knows, the only way of coming downstairs.” Already, Pooh has internalized Christopher Robin’s actions as the parent’s act of love. In other words, Pooh does not know any better and believes that Christopher Robin dragging him down the stairs means that he loves him. It’s important to note that the child-as-parent is not part of the Arcadia that Milne sought to create through Christopher Robin in the Hundred Acre Wood. For the purposes of this chapter, though, I will focus on Milne’s representation of “Christopher Robin” as an idealized child in relationship with his “stuffed” animal friends.

Stuffed animals, or toys in general, are important in the work of British psychologist Melanie Klein, as discussed in Kuznets’s *When Toys Come Alive*. Klein agrees with the well-known idea that “toys seem to be the natural means by which children express themselves” (38), but she worked with children who had emotional disturbances. Neo-Freudian analyst D. W. Winnicott furthers Klein’s ideas that “in play psychotherapy, the toys become bound with symbolic meaning and are used to express phantasies, wishes, fears, and actual experiences” (38). In play, children sometimes express the repressed memories of traumatic experiences, much like Alice Miller claims that writers use their writing to express repressed memories of trauma and neglect. Milne’s writing, as he claims in his autobiography, results from “heredity and environment,” which makes the child and in turn makes the man and the writer. The heredity and environment Milne grew up with inspired his need to re-imagine that environment as emotionally stable. Consequently, Milne used his writing as a way to express the repressed memories of emotional detachment from his attachment figures, particularly his mother. Kuznets describes the phenomenon of toys as expressionistic through Winnicott’s work:

He investigates those objects to which children become notably, even obsessively, attached, in a manner that in an adult would be described as fetishistic. He

postulates that objects like “security blankets” are used by children in their early experiences not just for sensual gratification, as some other psychoanalysts have postulated, but as a means of bridging the gap between the self and others, particularly the primary parent – usually the mother – who is responsible for the earliest care. (38)

Through Winnicott’s investigation, it is clear that toys are more than objects meant to comfort and stimulate children or objects that enable children to play out inner conflicts and trauma.

Toys allow children to establish who they are in relation to their environment, particularly to a “primary parent” or attachment figure, by way of “transitional objects.” Such objects become essential for children’s developing schema of their environment and identities, and “according to Winnicott, while the primary parent is rapidly becoming ‘not me’ in a way the child cannot control, the transitional object seems to the child paradoxically to be both self, or ‘me,’ and other, or ‘not me’” (Kuznets 39). In discerning self from other, children are able to find a place for themselves in their environments. Throughout his books about Christopher Robin, Pooh, and the other animals, Milne uses the “stuffed” animals to build a childhood for himself that contains living, thinking, and comforting friends. He establishes Pooh first as a stuffed animal of Christopher Robin’s by way of dragging him down the stairs, but because Milne attributes “agency” to Pooh, the bear becomes more than merely a stuffed toy, but rather, Milne transforms him into an object of attachment, or as Milne would call it, a “friend.” By taking once lifeless objects and turning them into beings that transcend the function of play, Milne creates a world in which he can distinguish his writer self from his re-imagined childhood other.

To complicate matters further, Milne acknowledges that he modeled his re-imagined

childhood of the Hundred Acre Wood on his own son, and so it is no accident that Christopher Robin looks like Milne's son – also named Christopher – and both look like the Little Lord Fauntleroy projected onto Milne as a child by his mother. A triangulated narcissism informs Milne's desire to remember and to repress.

According to Winnicott, children are attached to toys and use them to distinguish themselves from others, namely their primary caregivers, or attachment figures, and that the toys themselves are surrogate attachment figures. Not only do toys transition children into the world of self versus other, but they also give comfort to children in the absence of parents. Kuznets comments on Brian Sutton-Smith's three types of toys:

“toys of acquaintance,” or ephemeral signs of conspicuous consumption that are quickly discarded; “toys of identification,” or consoling objects designed to help mitigate loneliness and separation from their givers (although the toys can sometimes be used creatively and idiosyncratically); and “age-and-sex stereotypical toys,” which may be used for imaginative play but become socializing “tools” rather than true playthings. (41-42)

The animals in *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* are in the second category of consolation and creativity. This makes sense, since Christopher Robin lives in the Hundred Acre Wood without parents and the animals act as consoling objects to the boy in the absence of parents. The fact that Milne translated his observations of his son's play with the stuffed animals into literature about himself as a re-imagined child with a similar type of childhood reflects a curious absence of parental familiarity in his life. Milne felt not only the need to re-invent his environment but also the need to re-invent and so idealize himself as a child as well – at his son's expense (more on this later).

In the Arcadian world without parents, and in Milne's own life where his parents left him to be raised by nannies, Milne felt it was necessary for his avatar-self in the Hundred Acre Wood to have emotional attachment to *something*. And it makes sense that the something is the "stuffed" animals, because a child becomes attached to his toys when his parents are unavailable for emotional indulgence. I am arguing that Milne's Hundred Acre Wood functions as an idealized imaginary world that serves to repress the memories of Milne's emotionally stagnant childhood. Furthermore, I maintain that Milne uses the anthropomorphized animals in his stories as attachment objects, not in the sense that they meet the developmental needs of Christopher Robin, but rather, that they represent Milne's repressed emotional needs that he cannot allow himself, or Christopher Robin, and so he projects – that is, rejects and attributes – his emotional and developmental needs onto the attachment objects who are then free to "need" Christopher Robin even as the boy stays coolly aloof from his own needs for them. Christopher Robin's emotional detachment from the animals serves to transition him from imagination to reality, or from childhood to youth. *Winnie-the-Pooh* begins with the childhood of Christopher Robin, and *The House at Pooh Corner* ends with his entrance into youth.

### **Projection of Parental Power**

As I mentioned earlier, in "Chapter I: We Are Introduced to Winnie-the-Pooh and Some Bees, and the Stories Begin," readers already know the power relations at work between Christopher Robin and Winnie-the-Pooh. Christopher Robin acts as the parent, who pulls his stuffed animal, Pooh, downstairs on his head, and Pooh accepts his acts as acts of love. A similar course of action occurs later on in the same chapter, during which Pooh attempts – and fails – to gather honey from a beehive high up in a tree. Since Christopher Robin is all-knowing

as the parent, Pooh seeks his guidance by asking him for a blue-colored balloon, which then lifts Pooh into the air and disguises him as “a raincloud.” In addition, Pooh asks Christopher Robin to walk below him with an umbrella, which would make the bees believe “it is about to rain.” The bees, though, are not fooled and begin to sting Pooh, who tells Christopher Robin that he must pop the balloon with his gun. Christopher Robin “aimed very carefully at the balloon, and fired. ‘Ow!’ said Pooh. ‘Did I miss?’ [Christopher Robin] asked. ‘You didn’t exactly *miss*,’ said Pooh, ‘but you missed the *balloon*.’ ‘I’m so sorry’” (Milne 22).

According to Kuznets, children often act out aggression with their toys. Pooh is an anthropomorphized toy, and in a sense, Christopher Robin’s child. When viewing Christopher Robin from the perspective of “poisonous pedagogy,” Christopher Robin’s actions are particularly cruel and unfounded. Christopher Robin would find a way to save Pooh even if it means firing a gun at him. However, as a parent-figure informed by the dominant ideology of Milne’s day, Christopher Robin’s actions are “correct” because they are for Pooh’s own good. Because Pooh accepts Christopher Robin shooting him down as an act of love, Pooh is passively obedient and thankful for his “help” even though he has been shot.

Christopher Robin continues to demonstrate that parental authority, violence and love are tangled affairs. In one particular scenario from “Chapter II: Pooh Goes Visiting and Gets Into a Tight Place,” Pooh gets hungry and visits Rabbit, in the hope of getting something to eat. After indulging in too much food, Pooh becomes lodged in the entryway to Rabbit’s house. Even though Rabbit is a type of “alpha” character in relation to the other animal characters, he loses his position of authority with the appearance of Christopher Robin. The power relationship that Christopher Robin has with Pooh translates into the relationships he has with the other animal characters as well. As such, in relation to Christopher Robin-as-adult, Pooh and Rabbit are

siblings in conflict. And Rabbit, who is the child in this scene, goes to find Christopher Robin, the parent who will know how to solve the problem of removing Pooh from Rabbit's front entrance, thus allowing Rabbit to continue to be on his own.

When Christopher Robin discovers that Pooh has lodged himself in Rabbit's entrance from overeating, he says, "'Silly old Bear,' in such a loving voice that everybody felt quite hopeful again" (Milne 31). In *For Your Own Good*, Alice Miller explains about "poisonous pedagogy" that "children raised in this way frequently do not notice, even at an advanced age, when someone is taking advantage of them as long as the person uses a 'friendly' tone of voice" (6). I think that this is a scene in which Milne has unconsciously reproduced the friendly tone of absolute authority that he experienced and internalized as a child. Even though Milne did not know the name for the humiliation tactic that his father, John Vine Milne, used in printing personal academic information in the school magazine, such as "'he leaves his books about, loses pen...and cannot determine whether algebra is better than football or Euclid than a sponge cake'" (Thwaite 33), he did have the traumatic memory of having been routinely humiliated by his father the headmaster. As Alice Miller claims, writers express such repressed memories in their writing, and the humiliation Milne suffered at the hands of his father appears as Christopher Robin in the role of the father humiliating Pooh in the role of child. Ultimately, Christopher Robin takes advantage of Pooh's child-like nature to humiliate him and manipulate him into accepting Christopher Robin's punishment (which I will discuss shortly) by using a "friendly" and "loving" tone of voice.

Still in the role of the parent, Christopher Robin takes advantage of the situation and proceeds to punish Pooh for his oral greed, which, one might argue, represents another level of unconscious projection into the text. Oral greed is, according to Miller, associated with

unsatisfied developmental needs for love and attachment in one's earliest months and years.

While Pooh is certainly in a troubling position, Christopher Robin decides to let Pooh stay in the hole for a week and says, "I'm afraid no meals...because of getting thin quicker. But we *will* read to you" (Milne 32). So, Pooh's punishment for feeling emotionally starved is for Christopher Robin to let him *starve* again, which is a subtle cruelty disguised as "training" that has a place in "poisonous pedagogy." Christopher Robin's punishment of Pooh is, arguably, a common occurrence among children punishing their "stuffed" animals, just as "playing school" or "playing house" often results in assorted punishments for transgressing toys. Attachment theory indicates that children learn such aggression from their adult caregivers, and when combined with a sense of abandonment from parents, a child's projected aggression against the "Other" can be rather intense. As they are larger and more knowing than their toys, children enact the position of adult power with the animals in the position of "child" and "other." The child's play reenacts what the child has suffered at the hands of adults, but in the child's play the roles are reversed. The child's play becomes aggressive and quasi-violent in proportion to adult requirements for the child to repress emotional reaction to adult cruelty, for according to "poisonous pedagogy," reacting emotionally against adult power and adult cruelty is a sign of disobedience and a wicked nature.

In *For Your Own Good*, Alice Miller writes that "rage and pain can apparently pass quickly if one is free to express them" (273). The suffering that Milne experienced as a child translated unconsciously into Christopher Robin acting out the role of father and prescribing punishment to his child, Pooh, which Kuznets explains as "a safe form of acting out that has its fascination and its terror" (43). It is fascinating for children to be in the role of adult power because they are testing out what they have learned from their own parents, but it is also

terrifying because of the responsibility and power – and nascent revenge tendencies – that they wield over their subjugated, inferior toy “children.” Milne’s Christopher Robin inhabits this difficult position in the Pooh books. Christopher Robin plays the role of parent who succeeds in using a voice that represents the manipulative tone of “poisonous pedagogy,” and so Christopher Robin punishes Pooh (without being conscious of the subtle cruelty involved) for being a child, for having oral needs, and for not knowing how best to meet those needs. In this scene then Christopher Robin echoes Milne’s father and how he often used the “friendly” and “loving” tone of voice to humiliate Milne as a child for his so-called “wrongdoing.” Like Pooh, Milne only knew what his parents told him, just as “the toys know of no other power in their lives, and their feelings for [Christopher Robin] amount to worship” (Carpenter 204). In his autobiography, Milne confirms this notion when he describes his father as “the best man I have ever known” and even equates him to God (40). Similarly, the animals worship Christopher Robin as God in the Pooh books, and as part of “poisonous pedagogy,” children must obey their parents and God without question. And the animals do just that – they accept Christopher Robin’s prescription for punishment without trying to find another way to dislodge Pooh. The internalized desire to play the role of parent manifested itself in Milne as Christopher Robin – the once powerless is the now powerful. I would argue then that moments of Milne’s childhood when he lost his power to his father are here reenacted between Christopher Robin and Pooh.

There are other instances from *Winnie-the-Pooh* of the animals needing Christopher Robin’s intelligence and support, only two of which I will discuss here. It should be noted that there are no scenes where Christopher Robin needs any advice from the animals. In this way, the animals act as Christopher Robin’s children, for whom he is their father-figure. He is emotionally aloof in front of the animals and criticizes them from a distance. As I mentioned

earlier, Milne re-imagines himself in a childhood that is similar to his own. And so, despite the animals always coming to Christopher Robin for help, Christopher Robin does not become attached to them. Milne projected his feelings of inadequacy onto the animals, who are starved for the affection and attention of the only father-figure they know – Christopher Robin. In spite of Milne’s conscious attempt to idealize the Hundred Acre Wood as childhood Arcadia, what emerges in the Pooh books is a symbolic and unconscious representation of what his parents withheld from him. Even as he tries to offer a kinder and gentler vision of what childhood might be, Milne inadvertently and unconsciously defends and even valorizes what happened to him.

In “Chapter VIII: Christopher Robin Leads an Expedition to the North Pole,” Christopher Robin announces that he and the animals are going on an expedition. Although they are not sure what an expedition is, Pooh and Piglet discuss what exactly they are going to do when they arrive at the North Pole. Pooh’s unawareness of what is happening around him and Piglet’s timidity and apprehension are reminiscent of a child’s uncertainty and incomplete cognitive skills in making sense of the world. While there are no visible adults in the Hundred Acre Wood, the animals constantly look to Christopher Robin, a child in appearance and simple reasoning, whom they view as the authority. Even though Piglet is afraid to go on the expedition, he concedes, ““But if Christopher Robin is coming I don’t mind anything”” (Milne 107). Piglet is small in stature, and Christopher Robin is taller and more stable in his upward mobility. For the animals, the difference in stature translates into intelligence, as many children equate tallness with having more knowledge. Having the boy around in case of unforeseen dangers is important to such a small animal, not unlike a child needing the presence of an adult to reassure him that he will be protected. Since the other animals are siblings, they cannot provide significant comfort to their brother, Piglet. Only when Christopher Robin is present do

the animals feel as though everything will be fine. As a parent, Christopher Robin's presence alone boosts Piglet's courage in exploring the unknown North Pole.

However, Christopher Robin does not provide any other reassurance other than his physical presence. In fact, he tells the animals to "'Hush!' when 'coming to a Dangerous Place'" (110). Christopher Robin does not help the animals so much as he warns them of impending danger but can do nothing to prevent it.

Although Milne sought to build an Arcadia free of adults, one adult (for certain) does appear in his Pooh books. The problematic relationship that Milne had with his mother manifests itself in the relationship between Kanga (mother) and Roo (child). Milne writes in his autobiography,

The private sitting-room of the family had its windows over the playground, and it is to be supposed that our mother, looking out from time to time, and seeing her little ones balanced precariously fifteen feet over the gravel, or crushed into it by some bigger boy, said "Oh, dear" to herself, and "Must they?" But she showed none of this, knowing that a mother's job is not to prevent wounds, but to bind up the wounded. In any case she had the Victorian woman's complete faith in the rights of a father. (27)

In this passage, Milne almost gives the definition of what a detached mother is: she does not prevent wounds but heals them and is therefore emotionally uninvolved. Milne's mother has almost no reaction to seeing her children on the brink of danger.

Much like Milne's mother, Kanga is a mother who does little to prevent her child, Roo, from getting hurt. In "Chapter VIII: Christopher Robin Leads an Expedition to the North Pole," Kanga watches as Roo falls into a pool and merely asks if he is all right. As Roo repeatedly

tumbles over little waterfalls, “Owl was explaining that in a case of Sudden and Temporary Immersion the Important Thing was to keep the Head Above Water; Kanga was jumping along the bank, saying ‘Are you *sure* you’re all right, Roo dear?’ to which Roo, from whatever pool he was in at the moment was answering ‘Look at me swimming!’” (Milne 115-16). “Detachment parenting” entails that the parent holds back emotionally and physically from the child’s life. Kanga exemplifies what it means to be a detached parent by keeping a distance between herself and her child, similar to Milne’s mother watching from a window as her children played near a cliff. At the same time, though, these two mothers supposedly know what is right for their children but purposefully repress those instincts. In Milne’s mother’s case, it is no mystery why she does not rush to prevent disaster – she believes it is the father’s right to manage the children. But in Kanga’s case, she has no excuse why she could not have prevented Roo from falling into the water.

Perhaps Kanga, unwilling to jump in to save Roo from drowning, is listening to a father figure. In this scenario, Owl explains to her that if Roo keeps his head above water he will not drown. In doing nothing, Kanga places complete faith in not only her son’s ability to swim but also in Owl’s recommendations. Owl here functions as the all-knowing father and represents an unconscious reproduction of Milne’s childhood. Milne’s intention was to create an adult-free world, but alas, Alice Miller’s sentiment that writers invariably express their repressed memories proves true in terms of the animals and their relationships. Kanga then must parent according to an idea or philosophy that comes from Owl rather than from her own emotional need to save her son. Perhaps this is a scene in which the child, Roo, will develop security and confidence in saving himself from the flood. Or, perhaps this is a scene in which ideology overwhelms instinct and Kanga abandons and betrays Roo in the name of Owl’s ideological admonitions.

In the previous chapter, “Chapter VII: Kanga and Baby Roo Come to the Forest, and Piglet Has a Bath,” readers discover what sort of creature Kanga is, albeit from an unreliable source, Piglet. After the animals find that strange new creatures are in the Hundred Acre Wood, Piglet provides some information about the creatures: “‘There’s just one thing,’ said Piglet, fidgeting a bit. ‘I was talking to Christopher Robin, and he said that a Kanga was Generally Regarded as One of the Fiercer Animals’” (Milne 89). Rabbit, like a child jealous of the arrival of a new sibling, plots to kidnap Roo. Since we cannot ignore the fact that Kanga has a child, Roo, we must look at Kanga not only as one of the animal-child characters but also an adult-mother figure. As an animal, Kanga is described as being “fierce.” Fierceness implies that the character would also display rage, yet Kanga is gentle and often calls the other characters “dear.”

However, as a mother, Kanga is “fierce” in the sense that she is careless and does not listen to her child. Later on in the same chapter, Kanga mistakes Piglet for Roo and takes him home for a bath. Despite Piglet’s angry pleas of “‘Can’t you *see*?...Haven’t you got *eyes*? Look at me!’” (99), Kanga does not listen to what he says and continues to give him a bath. Even when Piglet demands that Kanga realize that he is not Roo, she says that she sees that he *is* Roo. During the bath, Piglet gets soap in his mouth and cannot speak; Kanga’s reaction is, “‘That’s right, dear, don’t say anything’” (100). As a mother, Kanga should know what is best for her child, yet she picks up the wrong child – mistaking Piglet for Roo – and silences him when he needs to tell her something important. Milne’s mother often overlooked her sons’ needs, particularly when she could see them playing on the edge of a cliff and said nothing to them. Milne’s emotional distance from his mother translated into an unconscious commentary on her, whom Kanga embodies.

## Transitional Countries

Kuznets writes that the “Hundred Acre Wood operates as both a ‘peepshow into paradise’ and a transitional country” (47). According to Winnicott, the Hundred Acre Wood is an ideal world, an Arcadia, but at the same time it represents a transitional world in which the child learns to leave behind his needs for transitional love objects. We see this dynamic at work in the introduction of Christopher Robin and Winnie-the-Pooh as the boy drags his stuffed animal love-object down the stairs. At the bottom of the stairs, the boy meets an adult narrator (presumably A. A. Milne), who “gives some acknowledgment not only of the child’s part in inspiring imaginative storytelling but, interestingly, of Pooh’s consciousness operating between him and the child” (Kuznets 50). Even though Pooh has conscious thoughts, he is still an immobile being – just the stuffed animal that Christopher Robin drags around. Pooh cannot even speak for himself yet, so when the narrator mentions that Pooh likes to play a game, Christopher Robin speaks for him: “‘Could you very sweetly tell Winnie-the-Pooh [a story]?’” (Milne 8). In doing so, Christopher Robin conveys Pooh’s wishes to the narrator, which creates a roundabout exchange of ideas among author-narrator, boy-character and animal-toy.

The three-way exchange, based on the true-life triangulated relationships among A. A. Milne, Christopher Milne, and Winnie-the-Pooh, is important in allowing Christopher Robin to distinguish himself from both the narrator and his “stuffed” animal. Winnicott “identifies the juggling act going on in the frames of *Winnie-the-Pooh* as a transitional phenomenon similar to the one he postulates for the infant, the object, and the parent (although the parent is usually the mother in his scenario)” (Kuznets 50). Toys are transitional objects that, in the absence of the parent (mother), allow the child to distinguish the self from the other. The same scenario is happening in the triangular exchange between Christopher Robin, Pooh, and the narrator (infant,

object, and parent). Winnicott further explains that

the three here are mutually dependent: Christopher Robin is dependent on Winnie-the-Pooh for mediating between him and the narrator and dependent on the narrator for making a story of his experiences with his toys; the narrator is dependent upon both Christopher Robin and Pooh for his inspiration; Winnie-the-Pooh is dependent upon both Christopher Robin and the narrator for recognizing him and giving him a name (frequently the first step toward becoming a subject), a consciousness, a personality. (50)

Through this exchange, the reader recognizes Christopher Robin as the child, and Pooh as his stuffed animal. Moreover, Christopher Robin realizes that he is the self, “me,” and that the narrator and Pooh are others, “not me.”

In the “transitional country” of Milne’s Arcadia, an important occurrence is for the child to realize he is a being separate from the narrator. He does so through the use of his transitional object, the “stuffed” animal, Pooh. His realization is complete when the narrator’s voice, “I,” ceases and the stories about Christopher Robin, Pooh, and the other animals begin. However, even though Pooh is first a “stuffed” animal and therefore an extension of Christopher Robin’s personality, he is also a separate being with his own consciousness. The first time Pooh realizes that he is also separate from Christopher Robin is when Christopher Robin speaks for him again:

“Winnie-the-Pooh wasn’t quite sure,” said Christopher Robin.

“Now I am,” said a growly voice. (Milne 9)

The “growly voice” is Pooh’s awakening as a conscious being, separate from Christopher Robin’s consciousness. Immediately after the narrator “I” briefly leaves the story, Pooh begins to think in a deliberate and logical pattern:

“That buzzing-noise like that, just buzzing and buzzing, without its meaning something. If there’s a buzzing-noise, somebody’s making a buzzing-noise, and the only reason for making a buzzing-noise that *I* know of is because you’re a bee.” Then he thought another long time, and said: “And the only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey.” And then he got up, and said: “And the only reason for making honey is so *I* can eat it.” (Milne 9-10)

Without the narrator or Christopher Robin telling Pooh what he thinks, Pooh is thinking on his own, albeit about food. To emphasize the point that Pooh is now a separate, conscious being, Pooh’s reference to himself is emphatic as the italicized “*I*” indicates.

The narrator is not completely absent from the story. After Pooh falls from the tree trying to obtain honey, he thinks of Christopher Robin, and the story is interrupted again by Christopher Robin asking if Pooh is thinking of him; the narrator reassures him that Pooh is indeed thinking of him (Milne 13). Christopher Robin is startled to hear Pooh say his name because he has newly discovered himself to be separate from Pooh and the narrator. Even so, Christopher Robin still considers Pooh an attachment figure because Pooh is the closest thing he has to an emotional connection in the Hundred Acre Wood. As a child, Milne’s parents were emotionally detached, so as the character Christopher Robin, he has the fundamental need to make emotional connections in the absence of parents. Despite Pooh’s child-like notions that he can get honey if Christopher Robin pretends that Pooh is a rain cloud (Milne 20) and that the North Pole is really a pole that he can find (120), Christopher Robin still loves Pooh as an attachment figure. By the close of the first chapter in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, Pooh still has no honey, and the story ends with another exchange between the narrator and Christopher Robin. They talk about more stories to come, and “Christopher Robin gave a deep sign, picked his Bear up by the

leg, and walked off to the door, trailing Pooh behind him” (24). He is exhausted from a day of recognizing himself as “me” and the narrator and Pooh as “not me” and so transforms his separate animal Pooh back into a stuffed animal.

In the final chapter of *Winnie-the-Pooh* “Christopher Robin Gives Pooh a Party, and We Say Good-Bye,” Christopher Robin completes the narrative cycle by dragging Pooh up the stairs and by doing so transforms his friend back into an inanimate bear and, presumably, transforms himself back into an ordinary and powerless child.

### **The Function of Transition in *The House at Pooh Corner***

In *Winnie-the-Pooh*, Christopher Robin transitions from knowing the self to knowing the other (“me” and “not me”) through the use of his “stuffed” animals. In *The House at Pooh Corner*, the animals continue to look up to Christopher Robin for parental guidance. However, his presence and authority is less noticeable, particularly near the end of the book. Due to Christopher Robin’s presence gradually decreasing, the animals experience a new relationship among themselves. Since the animals are Christopher Robin’s children, and they all live together in the Hundred Acre Wood, they are a kind of sibling group. While I did mention some instances of a power struggle between the characters in *Winnie-the-Pooh* – such as Rabbit’s jealousy toward Kanga and Roo and Owl’s attempt to govern Kanga’s parenting – their sibling rivalry becomes more pronounced in *The House at Pooh Corner*. At that point, Christopher Robin is more emotionally detached from the animals, as he is transitioning from childhood to youth, from imagination to reality, or from playtime to school. And the animals are left to contend with each other over the power that Christopher Robin has placed in their paws with his absence. In this section, I will focus on the sibling rivalry among the animals and the

“transitional country” of the Hundred Acre Wood in *The House at Pooh Corner*, which changes from Christopher Robin’s nursery to his school.

### **Sibling Rivalry**

Milne was the youngest of three boys and he would often go unnoticed. He complains in his autobiography that his older brothers, Barry and Ken, could stick out their tongues at the governess, “but my tongue would not be noticed. Miserably I would withdraw it, and wait to be held up to the others as a model of propriety” (15). As a child, Milne did not have the power that his brothers seemed to have, and he surrendered to them, as he writes, “as a model of propriety,” but it was mostly out of helplessness. In writing about the sibling rivalry of the stuffed animals, it might prove illuminating to consider that Milne reproduces the memories of vying with his brothers for the power to be, among other things, rude to the governess.

While Christopher Robin does appear occasionally to comment on what the animals are doing in *The House at Pooh Corner*, his parental guidance is noticeably absent from a large portion of the book. Instead, he merely comments on what the animals are doing. Because of his absence, the parental power he once wielded begins to shift elsewhere. The animals are once again “unstuffed” and must take care of themselves without the help of their parent, Christopher Robin. In “Chapter I: A House is Built at Pooh Corner for Eeyore,” Pooh and Piglet decide to build Eeyore a house when they arrive at “Eeyore’s Gloomy Place, which was where he lived” (Milne 161). As siblings, they do not want to see Eeyore in desolation, as he usually is. Pooh and Piglet choose a site to build the house, and Pooh declares, ““And we will call this Pooh Corner...I could call this place Poohanpiglet Corner if Pooh Corner didn’t sound better, being smaller and more like a corner”” (163). Without Christopher Robin the parent there, Pooh, being

“the favorite, of course, there’s no denying it” (4), feels that he has the authority to be the one in control. He dominates the project of building Eeyore’s house, and Piglet, the smaller sibling, cannot possibly gain power over the larger, more capable sibling. Christopher Robin only enters the story at the end, when Pooh and Piglet complete the house, to stare at it and say nothing (170). Christopher Robin does not figure prominently in these stories because he is slowly leaving behind his playful world of childhood to enter the adult world of education. The Arcadia for him is ending, while for his animal children, it still exists as it always has – with the exception that Christopher Robin is leaving them to vie for his position as the parent in power. In this way, Pooh has the advantage of being in control, whereas in *Winnie-the-Pooh* Christopher Robin would have taken command of the project from the beginning.

Another case of sibling rivalry occurs in “Chapter II: Tigger Comes to the Forest and Has Breakfast.” In this chapter, Milne introduces Tigger, who arrives in the Hundred Acre Wood late one night and forces Pooh to let him in his house. Tigger is hyperactivity and “exuberance so unbridled that they become a kind of aggression towards other people” (Carpenter 203). Tigger’s entrance into Pooh’s house is hostile and unnerving, especially when Pooh tries to explain the different items in his house, but Tigger bounces from one thing to another. Tigger represents a child’s rambunctiousness to the point of annoyance to other children. In this particular scene, Pooh is the other child who grows exasperated with Tigger. From the start of breakfast, Pooh does not want to share his honey, but Tigger is a guest. Upon tasting the honey, Tigger declares, “‘Tiggers don’t like honey.’ ‘Oh!’ said Pooh, and tried to make it sound Sad and Regretful...Pooh felt rather pleased about this” (Milne 176-77). Pooh is elated that Tigger does not like the honey, which means Pooh does not have to share his favorite food.

Such selfishness is common among siblings: they do not want to share their favorite

toy/food/book with each other, and so a conflict builds for domination of that item. However, in the case that a sibling does not care for the desired item, the other child will be consciously insincere in his regret – that is, he will pretend to be saddened by his return of power, but actually, he will be elated that he has won the conflict. With Tigger’s appearance, a contest for domination arises between Tigger and Pooh. Before Tigger arrives, Pooh has control in his own house and enjoys his honey, which functions as a toy here, without having to share, not unlike a child who at present possesses a coveted item. Upon Tigger bouncing into Pooh’s house unexpectedly, he is seen as the hostile child who is looking to dismantle Pooh’s stability in his own home. Tigger’s desire to eat Pooh’s honey is almost unbearable to Pooh because he has to *share* an object that he loves with Tigger, his brother. The desire indicates Pooh’s loss of control not only in his house but over his favorite item, much like a child who might suddenly lose possession of his love-object to what he believes is a less-deserving child. When Tigger announces that he does not like honey, Pooh sounds sincere in his regret, but the key is that he *tries* to make it sound regretful, which means that Pooh is conscious of the fact that he is being dishonest.

If Christopher Robin the father were to enter the narrative at the point when Pooh is reluctant to share his honey, he would have forced Pooh to allow Tigger a turn with his favorite “toy.” As a parent, and as a character in the (seemingly) harmonious Hundred Acre Wood, Christopher Robin would be naturally inclined to eliminate the rivalry that exists between his children, Pooh and Tigger. Without the power struggle over the domination of honey, and without Christopher Robin’s parental interruption, Pooh can continue to be selfish in his domination of the “toy,” honey. It would be devastating if Tigger were to enjoy Pooh’s favorite “toy” in Pooh’s house because that would mean the power would shift to Tigger.

A melding of sibling rivalry and parental power occurs in “Chapter VII: Tigger is Unbounced.” In this chapter, Rabbit forces Pooh and Piglet to hide from Tigger, whose energy is beginning to infuriate his animal siblings. Moreover, Pooh becomes arrogant and oppositional to his siblings. Rabbit is speaking to Pooh and Piglet in front of Pooh’s house, while “the Forest was full of gentle sounds, which all seemed to be saying to Pooh, ‘Don’t listen to Rabbit, listen to me.’ So he got into a comfortable position for not listening to Rabbit” (251). Without Christopher Robin around, Pooh feels like he is the most important of the animals and therefore the worthiest of his siblings to be appointed acting-parent. If he wants to listen to his siblings, he will, but as the acting-parent, he can ignore their inferior, idle talk. Much of the rivalry that occurs among the animals revolves around Pooh struggling to gain the upper hand. Because Pooh is closest to Christopher Robin – in favoritism as a stuffed animal and as an extension of his personality – Pooh feels entitled to take Christopher Robin’s place. As such, Pooh tests out his parental power in a childish way, by choosing to ignore his siblings.

Once Christopher Robin arrives, however, Pooh’s power is usurped. As in Chapter I, Christopher Robin comes into the story at the end. Like God emerging from heaven, “out of the mist came Christopher Robin” (265). Even though Christopher Robin is not there to save Pooh or offer any fatherly advice, Pooh still looks at him as God. Pooh never asks Christopher Robin to join him at home, as he occasionally would invite him for lunch, and yet Christopher Robin says, “I’ll come and watch you” (266). It is a very unnerving moment to know that God is watching. In the illustration on page 266, Christopher Robin is sitting with his knees bent up to his chin, an oversized dominant being in Pooh’s tiny house, watching while Pooh eats honey and Piglet appears as an insignificant decoration in the background. Since Christopher Robin is akin to a father-figure and to God, Pooh cannot question his authority, especially when he is ogling

Pooh in the privacy of his own home. Unlike Tigger, from whom Pooh could take power, Christopher Robin cannot be overthrown. In that one moment when Christopher Robin says he will watch Pooh, he displays his right as a parent to lord over his child, who now must submit meekly. Without Christopher Robin around, there is a struggle among the animals to gain power; yet when he arrives, there is no question about who now holds the power. Silently, the animals accept Christopher Robin as their father and their God, whose actions and words are supposedly ever-loving and for their own good.

There is a moment when the animals still need Christopher Robin in “Chapter IV: “It Is Shown That Tiggers Don’t Climb Trees.” When Tigger and Roo are stuck in a tree, Pooh and Piglet seek Christopher Robin for his advice. As Eeyore and Christopher Robin emerge from the brush, Christopher Robin exclaims, “‘There’s Pooh!’ ... ‘It’s Christopher Robin!’ said Piglet. ‘*He’ll* know what to do’” (Milne 215). None of the characters acknowledge Pooh’s presence, as he is not the father figure that will help them solve the problem of safely lowering Tigger and Roo out of the tree. Piglet skips greeting his usually best friend Pooh to hear what Christopher Robin has to say; his emphasis on “*He’ll*” reflects Piglet’s urgency to worship Christopher Robin as not his friend but as father and as God. The animals clearly need Christopher Robin around to help them solve their problems, but the opposite is not true: Christopher Robin does not need the support of the animals, as he is the knowing father-figure. By re-inventing himself as the child-character Christopher Robin and attributing to him the role of the father-figure whom the animals need, Milne re-imagines his own childhood, but this time he has the power and beneath him are vulnerable, silly, needy creatures who need him even as he remains aloof and detached from any need for them. It is a conflicted and bittersweet dilemma that in many ways defines Milne’s conflicted relationship to his own past.

### Leaving Behind an Enchanted Place

Since Christopher Robin's authoritarian presence gradually decreases in *The House at Pooh Corner*, the second book is a turning point. His parental power over the animals is beginning to wane, and his emotional involvement in their lives is nearly gone. It is obvious at this point that the animals need Christopher Robin more than he needs them. Christopher Robin's transition from childhood to youth is already present in the introduction to *The House at Pooh Corner*, entitled "Contradiction." The title implies that the stories from the first book will no longer matter in the second book. Milne writes, "An Introduction is to introduce people, but Christopher Robin and his friends, who have already been introduced to you, are now going to say Good-bye. So this is the opposite" (153). *The House at Pooh Corner* has just begun, and already Milne is saying good-bye to the characters, especially to Christopher Robin, as he is the only one named in that address.

Is Milne saying good-bye to Christopher Robin's childhood? He continues with a sentiment about imagination and the Hundred Acre Wood: "There, still, we have magic adventures, more wonderful than any I have told you about; but now, when we wake up in the morning, they are gone before we can catch hold of them" (154). Milne compares forgetting the stories he has just related to his readers to forgetting dreams in the morning. Such a comparison, he implies, coincides with the loss of imagination and innocence. Kuznets writes that parents during the Victorian era wanted their children to "nostalgically mourn [imagination's] disappearance in adult life" (45). And just like the readers who will supposedly forget these stories, Christopher Robin will forget about his imagination and innocence through emotional detachment from the animals that he once cherished. The idea that the stories in *Winnie-the-Pooh* will not matter in *The House at Pooh Corner* follows the idea that imagination and

innocence will no longer matter once childhood has passed, since “they are gone before we can catch hold of them.”

Another indication of Christopher Robin’s transition into youth is a discussion of what is exciting in the “Contradiction.” The narrator, who is most assuredly A. A. Milne, interrupts Christopher Robin’s curiosity about a Pooh story with a question about math. Milne writes, “‘What about nine times a hundred and seven?’ And when we had done that one, we had one about cows going through a gate at two a minute, and there are three hundred in the field, so how many are left after an hour and a half? We find these very exciting, and when we have been excited enough, we curl up and go to sleep” (153). Does Milne truly believe that questions about math have become more exciting than the stories about Christopher Robin, Pooh, and the other animals? If so, this is a sad development. As the “Contradiction” indicates, math, which is exciting now, contradicts the stories of adventure and fun, which were exciting at one time. The “Contradiction” and its contents about math imply that the end of imagination and innocence comes along with education. Christopher Robin’s diminishing presence and increasing emotional detachment from the animals originates in the beginning of his education, which is evident in *The House at Pooh Corner*. The transition from childhood and imagination to youth and rational thinking happens as a result of education.

In Milne’s autobiography, he describes a moment when he and his brothers declared to their father that they wanted to be sailors. Being the stern, education-oriented parent that J. V. was, he responded, “‘Well, you’ll have to work, you know. There will be examinations to pass’” (54). His father’s answer was common during the Victorian era, for parents were more concerned with preparing their children for later life, and so for J. V. this meant that he had to stop his children from imagining a life outside anything academic. His sharp reply was enough

to prevent Milne from thinking any more about the navy: “That was as near as I got to the Navy: my father thought that I was too good for it” (54). As with the navy, Milne’s childhood imagination also sailed away.

From before Milne turned eleven, he internalized a part of dominant ideology of the Victorian era that education prevailed. As an adult writer, Milne reproduced what he had internalized as a child in the form of the character Christopher Robin as independent learner. The most noticeable occurrence of Christopher Robin’s transition into youth and education is in “Chapter V: Rabbit Has a Busy Day, and We Learn What Christopher Robin Does in the Mornings.” In this chapter, readers learn that Christopher Robin disappears to meet the mysterious “BISY BACKSON” (Milne 223), a name on a note that is left on his door. Rabbit wakes up that morning, feeling important, and thinks to himself, ““Christopher Robin depends on Me. He’s fond of Pooh and Piglet and Eeyore, and so am I, but they haven’t any Brain”” (220). In the emphasis on “Me” and “Brain,” it is clear that he believes he is the smartest and therefore worthiest to take Christopher Robin’s place as acting-parent. Yet, Rabbit is still concerned that Christopher Robin may return from the “BISY BACKSON” to eliminate the question of who holds the power, as he asks Eeyore, ““What happens to Christopher Robin in the mornings nowadays?”” (233). The readers, too, are wondering why Christopher Robin is curiously an inactive participant in *The House at Pooh Corner*.

In trying to discern the meaning of “BISY BACKSON,” Rabbit meets Piglet, who is cheering up Eeyore with violets. Piglet sees that Eeyore is spelling letters with sticks and mistakes an ‘A’ for an ‘O’: ““Not O, A,” said Eeyore severely. ‘Can’t you *hear*, or do you think you have more education than Christopher Robin?’” (232). Piglet, still the small child, is concerned with imagination while Eeyore is becoming enlightened by Christopher Robin’s

education. The fact that Eeyore questions whether Piglet's academic background is stronger than Christopher Robin's is certainly a reproduction of Milne's internalization of the importance of education. Eeyore, like Milne's father, sees that education, symbolized by his spelling, is vital and dismisses imagination, symbolized by Piglet's violets. In earnest, Eeyore elaborates on Christopher Robin's schooling: "What does Christopher Robin do in the mornings? He learns. He becomes Educated. He instigates – I *think* that is the word he mentioned – he instigates Knowledge" (233). "Educated" and "Knowledge" are capitalized to emphasize their importance over imagination and play. By the end of the chapter, Christopher Robin has corrected the "BISY BAKCSON" to read: "GONE OUT BACK SOON" (234). Christopher Robin is on his way to forgetting about the adventures he has had and transitioning into the world of forgetting through education.

Education marks the end of Christopher Robin's imagination, and so he must leave behind the enchanted place of the Hundred Acre Wood. At the end of "Chapter X: Christopher Robin and Pooh Come to an Enchanted Place, and We Leave Them There," education dominates imagination. In *Secret Gardens*, Humphrey Carpenter comments that "it is difficult to remain quite unmoved by this last chapter, in which a child tries to say farewell to childhood, cannot find the words for it, and then laughingly gives up the attempt" (204). Imagination lingers in Pooh, because when Christopher Robin asks Pooh to understand that he will still think of Pooh fondly when he is older, Pooh is blissfully unaware of what he is talking about: "Understand what?" (Milne 313). While Carpenter claims that in this scenario of leaving behind childhood, "coming as it does at the end of Milne's writings for children...one is inclined to regard it as a kind of *envoi*, a good-bye to an entire Golden Age" (205), I believe that it is yet another representation of repressed material from Milne's upbringing. As a child, Milne was taught to

regard education as the end of imagination and the beginning of training for later life; it is the same in Christopher Robin's attempt to say good-bye to his childhood. Christopher Robin is emotionally detached from the animals and so is emotionally detached from the world they inhabit, the Hundred Acre Wood, and so by extension, childhood. Even though Christopher Robin's education marks his transition from childhood and imagination to youth and knowledge, Milne writes that there is still a place where imagination and play remain forever.

In the last paragraph of the chapter, Milne writes an eerie immortalization of the Arcadia he built: "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" (313-14). And here again, Milne's conscious need to idealize the past is in stark contrast against his need to reproduce his father's training. One way or another, Christopher Robin – and A. A. Milne – remain prisoners of childhood.

### **Conclusion: Beyond an Enchanted Place**

I have been writing about A. A. Milne and his hopes of creating an Arcadia where he could re-imagine his childhood as one free of the "poisonous pedagogy" that he suffered from as a child in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. He did so by establishing himself as the re-imagined child, Christopher Robin, who has adventures with Pooh and his other animal friends. In Milne's creative efforts, he not only created a child's paradise in the Hundred Acre Wood, but he also unconsciously reproduced some of the traumatic memories of his childhood and the relational practices associated with them. Even though Milne's intention was to elude his own childhood, he ultimately reproduced some aspects of his upbringing.

In *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*, Alice Miller argues that all

people suffer in their childhoods, but that writers write because they suffer and their writing is an attempt to express the pain they experience and the pain they have forgotten. The type of writing that Miller describes is *unconscious* because these writers write about repressed memories of trauma that they have buried so deeply that they have forgotten about them. In *Inventing the Child: Culture, Ideology, and the Story of Childhood*, Joseph Zornado writes that “the adult’s conscious and unconscious experiences always figure into the content, structure, and ideological awareness of the adult who constructs a children’s text” (120). The adult writer often expresses some long-buried childhood memories, particularly when writing literature for children. It is inevitable that stories about the writer’s own childhood will weave themselves into the text of children’s literature.

Certainly, in A. A. Milne’s case, there are some instances in his books that are reproductions of the memories of his Victorian/Edwardian childhood. Mostly, these memories, some of which are traumatic, involve his parents’ ideologically informed ways of raising him. In turn, the memories of these traumas continue to play out in *The House at Pooh Corner*, except less so. Christopher Robin decreasingly figures in the animals’ lives, as he is moving away from imagination to reality. These child-rearing ideologies of the Victorian and Edwardian eras conflicted with each other, as Milne’s mother wanted her sons to dress as Little Lord Fauntleroy, complete with long curling hair and girlish clothes, and his father wanted his sons to be “manly little fellows,” which meant strict instruction in academics. As a result, Milne was at odds with his parents’ wishes. He writes with an air of bittersweet resentment in his autobiography,

If I were a psycho-analytical critic, and if I thought that this Edwardian writer Milne were worth one of my portentous volumes, I should ascribe everything which he had done and failed to do, his personality as revealed in his books and

hidden in himself, to the consciousness implanted in him as a child that he was battling against the wrong make-up. (27)

According to Alice Miller, writers are acutely aware of past traumas and forgotten pain, which manifest themselves in many of the texts they author. Milne is no exception, as he reveals in this quote that he was aware that he was re-imagining his past, as a way to “battle against the wrong make-up.” At the same time, he was unaware of some other experiences of his past that found their way into his re-imagined self as a child in the Arcadia of the Hundred Acre Wood. It is interesting what is “hidden in himself,” those memories of past trauma that he unconsciously reproduced in his writing. Such memories are ingrained from childhood, and in *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, Alice Miller claims that writers cope with trauma from childhood by expressing repressed memories. For A. A. Milne, his expression of repressed memories was an unconscious process.

Other literary critics agree that some traumas from childhood may surface unconsciously in children’s literature. Although I did not find much in scholarship about Milne’s children’s books, I did find an article that describes the enduring nostalgia for childhood in the Pooh books. In “A Taste of Nostalgia: Children’s Books from the Golden Age – Carroll, Grahame, and Milne,” Robert Hemmings writes, “[Winnie-the-Pooh and his animal friends] 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” (73). Regardless of Milne’s best intentions to re-imagine his childhood in the Arcadian fantasy called the Hundred Acre Wood, there are still memories of the “disorder and uneasiness” of childhood that appear amid the nostalgic and playful scenes of a boy and his “stuffed” animals. However, children and adults generally see just the nostalgic aspect of the books, and those who do see

reminders of their own childhood traumas try to “forget” them, as they are meant to in the closing lines of *The House at Pooh Corner*. Imagination will be forever at play in Arcadia.

Despite the unsettling familiarity of childhood trauma that child and adult readers may find throughout the pages of Milne’s literature for children, *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* have become immensely popular among adults and children alike. Ann Thwaite has nothing but praise for Milne’s “masterpieces”:

All over the world, A. A. Milne’s children’s books are loved and cherished by children and parents together, and by a good many adults who are not parents. There are no better stories for sharing. There are no better stories for reading aloud and for finding one’s way back to that childhood world where it is possible to do Nothing, or at least nothing that has anything to do with anything. (398)

Thwaite, while caught up in the phenomenon of Winnie-the-Pooh, has become misguided in her understanding of the function of childhood in Milne’s books for children. Readers may think fondly of their childhood days when they read about Christopher Robin and Pooh’s expedition to the North Pole and their perpetual playing in the “enchanted place,” but if they read below the surface, they will find reminders of their own childhood traumas that I have described above. Childhood is only a transitional period for the preparations of later life – that is, the preparations of education that will lead away from imagination and move toward knowledge. Readers might not want to find their way back to childhood – at least not their own childhoods – but rather imagine a different kind of childhood as Milne did in creating the Arcadia of the Hundred Acre Wood.

There is something to say about A. A. Milne’s reaction to the fame that his children’s literature has garnered. Even though he writes in his autobiography that he was glad to have

made significant financial gain by publishing his stories, “what has been particularly irritating about the sales of the Christopher Robin books (even though irritation has produced no more intimidating retort than the writing of the name ‘Kwistopher Wobin’) is that the books were written for children” (281). Milne never intended to be a children’s author; he wanted to be remembered for more than his writings about Christopher Robin and Pooh. Carpenter writes about Milne’s displeasure in being “irrevocably identified with Pooh, and lived the rest of his life resenting that the public identified him almost solely with his children’s books, but failing to write anything else remotely as popular” (205). Milne’s son, Christopher, also suffered from the stigma of being associated with the Pooh books, as he was the inspiration for the character Christopher Robin, both in appearance and in some observed interactions with his stuffed animals.

Milne laments in his autobiography that “I wanted to escape from [writing children’s books] as I had once wanted to escape from *Punch* [literary magazine]; as I have always wanted to escape. In vain” (286). Why would Milne want nothing to do with his own literary success? His desire to escape from his children’s literature has little to do with the fact that he wanted to be more than a children’s author. I believe that the resentment he had for the Pooh books emerges from his desire to escape from his childhood. Through writing the Pooh books, Milne sought refuge from his Victorian childhood in the Hundred Acre Wood. Fame would only further remind Milne of the past traumas he tried to erase in his re-imagined childhood. However, Zornado writes about the impossibility of forgetting past traumas, which in turn cause the adult writer to unconsciously reproduce them. He explains, “Adult culture – especially as it manifests itself in the pedagogy of human relationships – represents the unconscious and ‘forgotten’ experiences of the child. In other words, the child *never forgets* what happens” (205).

Because of the inability to forget past traumas, Milne could not face the recognition he was receiving for something he wanted to forget. The irritation that Milne mentions in his autobiography is really the frustration at not being able to forget his childhood and at constantly getting reminders of it from his fans. His children's books continued to grow in popularity after his death in 1956, as they were the inspiration for numerous Walt Disney films, merchandise, television shows, and countless websites hosted by Disney as well as admirers. If only A. A. Milne were alive today, he would never be able to escape the fame of his Pooh books, as they would be on movie screens, television, store shelves, and the Internet.

A. A. Milne was not the only one who suffered from resentment toward the Pooh books. His son, Christopher Robin Milne, harbored a similar bitterness for the books. As I mentioned earlier, Alice Miller states in *For Your Own Good* that parents "have raised their children with the help of an unconscious storehouse filled with their own childhood experiences and have had no other recourse but to do everything the same way their parents did before them" (272). In other words, we become our parents. Just as Milne was doomed to unconsciously reproduce the traumas of his Victorian childhood, he also inescapably reproduced the same dominant child-rearing ideology that his parents welcomed when he was raising his son. In his autobiography, *The Enchanted Places*, Christopher Milne gives a testimonial about his appearance and to the kind of childhood he experienced:

I did indeed look just like that...At the time I accepted it as I accepted nursery food. It was just part of life. And I was that sort of child: the sort that accepts things without question...Too late now to know for sure, and so I must just try to piece together such clues as survive...It was [my mother] who outlined the hairstyle (leaving Nanny to do the actual scissor-work)...I suspect that, with my

golden tresses, I reminded my mother of the girl she had always wanted to have. And I would have reminded my father of the boy with long, flaxen hair he had once been. (109-110)

Milne raised Christopher the same way his parents had raised him. Christopher spent most of his childhood with his nanny, an act that “allows the mother to physically detach from the child long before the child seeks separation from her” (Zornado 104). His mother also made him to look like Little Lord Fauntleroy, as Ernest H. Shepard’s illustrations depict him; he resembled his father as a child.

Most importantly, though, Christopher’s parents taught him from a young age that they were always right and needed to be obeyed. It was not that Christopher was automatically an obedient child; he learned from the same “poisonous pedagogy” that A. A. Milne endured in his childhood. For Christopher, the books are also reminders of the childhood he endured having to look like Little Lord Fauntleroy and never being able to question his parents’ child-rearing decisions. In fact, he concedes in *The Enchanted Places* that his parents’ decisions “would have been in character” (110). To put another way, his parents had only their parents for the basis of their child-rearing ideology. In *For Your Own Good*, Alice Miller describes Christopher Milne’s realization as follows:

If an adult has been fortunate enough to get back to the sources of the specific injustice he suffered in his childhood and experience it on a conscious level, then in time he will realize on his own – preferably without the aid of any pedagogical or religious exhortations – that in most cases his parents did not torment or abuse him for their own pleasure or out of sheer strength and vitality but because they could not help it, since they were once victims themselves and thus believed in

traditional methods of child-rearing. (249)

Christopher was able to see that his parents could not be blamed for the way he was raised. His father, A. A. Milne, experienced his childhood through “poisonous pedagogy,” and his mother, Dorothy de Sélincourt, grew up on the cusp of the age of the Beautiful Child as well. When they became parents to Christopher, they could not help but reproduce the same child-rearing ideology that they experienced. Unfortunately, A. A. Milne did not come to the same realization, for he unconsciously reproduced the injustices, or traumas, he suffered in childhood in his children’s literature.

Christopher’s declaration that it is “too late now to know for sure” the reasons behind his upbringing echoes his father’s bittersweet remark that “it’s too late now” for him to be a different sort of writer, as his prominence in the literary world was already immortalized in the children’s books that Christopher Milne helped to make famous.

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