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The Intellectual Scale of Children's Fantasy: Telling Ideas in the Works of Lewis Carroll, J.M. Barrie, A.A. Milne, and E.B. White

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The Intellectual Scale of Children's Fantasy:

Telling Ideas in the Works of

Lewis Carroll, J.M. Barrie, A.A. Milne, and E.B. White

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Alethia Shih

2017

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Intellectual Scale of Children's Fantasy:

Telling Ideas in the Works of

Lewis Carroll, J.M. Barrie, A.A. Milne, and E.B. White

by

Alethia Shih

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Joseph E. Bristow, Chair

This dissertation focuses on the intellectual, philosophical, and narratological inquiries that undergird the children's literary fantasies of Lewis Carroll, J.M. Barrie, A.A. Milne, and E.B. White. Although existing scholarship has acknowledged the complexity of these authors' interests, such discussions have also remained overwhelmingly mired in preconceptions about the escapist and youthful qualities that define their works of fantasy. In this study, I argue that these writers were not only keenly attuned to the intellectual stakes of their writing for children, but also particularly interested in using fantasy as a means of exploring—or, more accurately, reimagining in different scales—some of the most important academic, political, and scientific ideas of their day. By drawing attention to the preoccupations that bridge these four authors' philosophical thought and their best-known works of children's fantasy, I suggest that literary

acts of rescaling, resizing, and recalibrating in these stories often operate as mechanisms for cognizing what it means to adapt in a rapidly changing, expanding world. In doing so, my research constructs a more cohesive narrative of the unique intellectual inquiries that have shaped the category of children's fantasy and offers a holistic framework for future studies of these contributions.

My first chapter examines Carroll's treatment of his young protagonist in his *Alice* novels. I assert that Alice's uniquely scaled adventures through the natural history landscape of Wonderland and a highly globalized chess game in the Looking-Glass world allow Carroll to engage in Oxonian debates concerning the child, the individual, and the evolution of the English language. My second chapter focuses on oddly scaled figures of storytelling in Barrie's *Peter Pan* stories, such as Liza and Irene, whose incongruent identities and ages enable them to become authorizers of narratives about the past, present, and future. My third chapter investigates Milne's contemplation of early-twentieth-century philosophical ideas in his *Pooh* tales, which grapple with the ordinary language and educational theories of Bertrand Russell and John Dewey. My fourth chapter analyzes the connections between White's vision of cosmopolitanism in his postwar writings and his portrayal of democratically-minded leaders such as Stuart and Charlotte in his children's novels.

The dissertation of Alethia Shih is approved.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

> "That's right, Eeyore. Drop in on any of us at any time, when you feel like it."
>
> —A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928)

This dissertation would have been impossible without the support, guidance, and patience of the countless folks who encouraged me to "drop in on them at any time" over the years (and welcomed me with open arms every time I did, even at the oddest hours). Among the most generous of these individuals is Joseph Bristow, whose infinite support for my pursuits—both academic and personal—has broadened my perspective and facilitated my growth as a scholar in every way conceivable. To study children's fantasy is to cherish the boundlessness of our imaginations: even so, I cannot imagine being where I am today without Joe's endless encouragement and enthusiasm. For this, I am eternally grateful.

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Although I did not "begin at the beginning" (as the King in *Alice in Wonderland* instructs), I certainly have to mention Katharine Wright, whose seminar at UC Berkeley first set me on the path to becoming a children's literature scholar. Your classroom was the start of it all, and I could not have done this without you. Many thanks as well to the editors and reviewers of *Lion and the Unicorn*, whose feedback on my *Stuart Little* article has been invaluable to my thinking about scale and fantasy. A version of this article appears in my fourth chapter.

A special note of gratitude also goes out to the individuals who have made this journey such an incredible one full of laughter and adventure: Richard Thai, Moupi Mukherjee, Fong Lui, the entire San Jose crew, and my Global Siblings, who have been my family away from home for the past six years. To the amazing colleagues who have proven themselves both "true friends and good writers": Gregory Toy, Amanda Hollander, Doris Voronca, Crescent Rainwater, Ellen Truxaw, Ji Eun Lee, Lindsay Wilhelm, Angelina Del Balzo and Allison Hegel. To the social media and digital marketing teams at Nickelodeon and DreamWorks: your endless encouragement of all of my pursuits means more than I could possibly put into words here.

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And now all the others are saying, "What about Us*?" So perhaps the best thing to do is to stop writing Acknowledgements and get on with the Dissertation.*

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Introduction

Children's literature has always been concerned with matters of scale. From the tiny Lilliputians found in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) to the miniscule protagonist Arrietty in Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* series (1952-82), these well-known examples highlight a recurring fascination in children's fiction with obvious physical discrepancies such as unusual smallness. As a consequence, much of the existing critical discourse surrounding these works has relied on the idea that size serves as a metaphoric crutch for childhood development: one need only think of Marah Gubar's keen observation that most critics "associate the trials and tribulations of miniature heroes with the plight of children, who must also navigate a world built to a scale that exceeds their size."[1] Problems of scale, however, also form a much more fluid and ubiquitous feature within the canon of children's literature than previous scholarship has tended to acknowledge. My dissertation examines the alternate (and often overlooked) discourses of scale that inform, engage, and render intellectually significant some of the best-known works of children's literary fantasy, from *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) to *Charlotte's Web* (1952). As I demonstrate in what follows, the core works that I have selected are each defined by a fundamental desire not only to explore various scales of history, epistemology, and storytelling, but also establish important literary mechanisms that can render these scales more intelligible.

In this respect, my project poses a central question about the current scope of scholarly approaches to children's fantasy literature: In what ways do familiar tropes such as growing, not growing, embodying the wrong types of identities, and navigating incongruous worlds actually reveal a deeper engagement with contemporaneous intellectual debates about scale and

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[1] Marah Gubar, "Species Trouble: The Abjection of Adolescence in E.B. White's *Stuart Little*," *Lion and the Unicorn* 27, no. 1 (2003): 98-99.

storytelling? When I refer to scale in this study, I am particularly interested in the relationships among certain spatial, temporal, narratological, or sociopolitical categories that do not seem to fit completely the narratives that they occupy. By resituating several widely acknowledged classics of children's literature within this framework, my research interrogates the critical commonplace that complex intellectual thought in these stories often exists as an addendum to (or perhaps even in tension with) their surface simplicity. Even now, it is not uncommon to see scholarship that attributes the success of children's literature authors to their childish spirits, as Carol Mavor does in her 2007 survey of "boyish" twentieth-century authors.[2] In the face of these judgments, I argue that it is important to understand these writers as conscientiously invested in telling stories about the emerging intellectual ideas of their day—stories invested in exploring, moreover, the very mechanisms that structure the language, reading, and creation that define their own writing. Through a detailed study of fictional works written by Lewis Carroll, J.M. Barrie, A.A. Milne, and E.B. White, I therefore contend that this genealogy of children's literary fantasy is in many ways absorbed by what it means to create narratives that recalibrate constantly the scales of philosophical, linguistic, and epistemological inquiry.

  This introduction establishes the framework for my project, which begins with an overview of existing scholarship that deals with issues such as scale and identity in the broad field of children's fantasy. This body of critical literature, as Gubar's comment makes apparent, has tended to focus almost exclusively on size as the primary metaphor for childhood experience: I start by tracing the history of these deeply rooted associations, which have been explored at great length in Susan Stewart's examination of the miniature in narrative and various other studies concerning the role of diminutive characters in stories for children. By drawing attention

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   [2] Carol Mavor, *Reading Boyishly: Roland Barthes, J.M. Barrie, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Marcel Proust, and D.W. Winnicott* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

to the key intellectual debates in which these works participate, my study demonstrates that the literary preoccupations of these authors form a continuum that has rarely been acknowledged by scholars of the field. In particular, I propose that wide-ranging academic topics such as scientific skepticism, linguistic theory, and global politics are pivotal rather than incidental to my selected works of children's fantasy.

In the second section of this introduction, my analysis turns to the problem of children's literature and genre, as well as my reasons for selecting the works of four well-established writers of children's fantasy in particular. As I demonstrate, some of the most influential studies concerning the category of children's literature have been extraordinarily conflicted: these approaches range from Jacqueline Rose's psychoanalytic theory in *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984), which draws attention to the unsettling relationship between adult desire and the figure of the child, to Gubar's recent and thoughtful reconsideration of childhood in *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (2009), which interrogates the claim that Victorian authors simply produced "escapist literature that idealized the child as a wholly natural being."[3] I also discuss the difficulty inherent in this ongoing debate, which often overemphasizes—as many do—the dichotomy between child and adult readerships, or what Peter Hunt calls the "implied reader." (As an alternative to this reader-oriented framework, I highlight the deliberateness with which the writings that I have selected address specific intellectual ideas rather than any particular readership, and thus avoid some of the generic paradoxes that currently beleaguer studies of children's literature.) Finally, I conclude by delineating my reasons for selecting the fantasy literature of Carroll, Barrie, Milne,

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[3] Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction,* 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 181.

and White as points of entry to my research. Ultimately, I suggest that these sources of children's fantasy are particularly well-suited to intellectual investigations of scale, not least of all because they embrace the expansive possibilities of imaginative transformation and adaptation that prepare them to cognize such complex debates.

The Child as Metaphor: The Problems of Defining Scale in Children's Fantasy Literature

One of the earliest surviving recorded English folktales was first published in 1621, with authorship attributed on the title page to R.I., or the British romance writer Richard Johnson.[4] This forty-page pamphlet features a character that is no bigger than a man's thumb, and boasts the following formidable title: *The History of Tom Thumbe, the Little, for his small stature surnamed, King Arthur's Dwarfe: whose Life and adventures containe many strange and wonderfull accidents, published for the delight of merry Time-spenders.* The stories that this book contains detail Tom Thumb's navigation of a human world through a series of dangerously scaled adventures, the most exciting of which includes his encounter with King Arthur (who promptly declares Tom his court dwarf).[5] Nor was this miniature hero unfamiliar to readers of his time: in 1584, English Member of Parliament Reginald Scot had published a book titled *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, in which he recalls an even earlier connection between the gallant Tom Thumb and oral stories told to children in the nursery:

But in our childhood, our mothers maids have so terrified us with an ouglie divell

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[4] Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *The Legend of Guy of Warwick* (New York: Garland, 1996), 198.

[5] "The Life and Death of Tom Thumbe," in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, ed. Thomas Percy (Philadelphia: T.F. Bell, 1860), 476.

having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a taile in/his breech…and they have so

fraied us with bull beggars, spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans,

faunes, sylens, kit with the cansticke, tritons, centaurs, dwarfes, giants, imps…the puckle,

Tom thumbe, hob gobblin, Tom tumbler, boneles, and such other bugs, that we are afraid

of our owne shadowes…[6]

The popular associations made between physical tininess and literature for children, of

course, began to emerge during the same period as the appearance of Johnson's folktale, when

publishers such as John Taylor designed miniature "Thumb Bibles" specifically for use by

children. In her examination of the relationships among narrative, the miniature, and the gigantic,

Susan Stewart explains that these miniature books represented "the two faces of children's

literature, the fantastic and the didactic, developed at the same time in the miniature book."[7] As

time progressed and narratives both about and for children were produced on a mass scale, the

child became increasingly visible as a symbol of the miniature: "The child continually enters

here as a metaphor, perhaps not simply because the child is in some physical sense a miniature of

the adult, but also because the world of childhood, limited in physical scope yet fantastic in its

content, presents in some ways a miniature and fictive chapter in each life history…We imagine

childhood as if it were at the other end of a tunnel—distanced, diminutive, and clearly framed."[8]

These early allusions to "Tom Thumbe" and miniature books, coupled with the repeated

elements of fantasy that intrude upon Johnson's list of nightmarish creatures calculated to instill

fear in young children, offer an apt starting point for understanding the historical intersection of

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[6] Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London: Elliot Stock, 1886), 122.

[7] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 43.

[8] Stewart, *On Longing*, 44.

scale and fantasy in the canon of children's literature. As I have mentioned previously, scholarly

discussions about the ways in which scale operates in this body of work have traditionally—and

in some ways unfortunately—been limited to considerations of physical size. This critical

preoccupation, of course, is not altogether surprising: miniature, Brobdingnagian, and other

oddly scaled figures are ubiquitous in the world of children's fantasy, making this body of works

an especially lucrative site for scrutinizing literary representations of size and developmental

experience. Among the diminutive characters that appear in this familiar literary tradition are

Tom Thumb, Swift's Lilliputians, Thumbelina, Carroll's size-shifting Alice, Norton's

Borrowers, and the toy Indian from Lynne Reid Banks's controversial fantasy novel *The Indian

in the Cupboard* (1980); there are also countless animal tales for children that are based on

characters' miniaturized adventures, from Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) and

Beverly Cleary's *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* (1965) to Kate DiCamillo's *The Tale of

Despereaux* (2003). (That is not even to mention, of course, the abundance of oversized figures

that appear in such works: these famously include the vicious giant from "Jack and the

Beanstalk," Roald's Dahl's BFG [Big Friendly Giant], and Norman Bridwell's Clifford [the Big

Red Dog].) My own project is in many ways indebted to these recurring tropes and traditions,

which first drew my attention to the physical scales that, upon closer examination, often allow

authors to probe more deeply into the broader scales of storytelling in which their works

participate.

The real difficulty arises, however, when scholars interpret these appearances of unusual

size in works of children's literature as straightforward analogies for the experiences of children

living in a disproportionally scaled (that is, grownup) world. This impulse is particularly true of

criticism surrounding Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, a novel that marks the beginning of my

study in part because of the overwhelming scholarship that focuses on the question of Alice's

sudden growth and shrinkage throughout her adventures. Consider, for instance, U.C.

Knoepflmacher's claim in *Ventures into Childland* that Carroll once attempted to compensate for

the inevitable aging of Alice Liddell (the real-life inspiration for his *Alice* stories) by publishing

a truncated version of the original book—known as *The Nursery "Alice"*—in 1889.

Knoepflmacher observes: "If, in the Wonderland stories, he had tried to reduce the size of a

growing seven-year-old who, at one point, fears that she may altogether shrink away, he now

produced a shrunken text he wished to be 'thumbed, to be cooed over, to be dogs'-eared, to be

rumpled, to be kissed.'"[9] The idea that authors such as Carroll use size as a mechanism of control

over their child protagonists is not at all unusual, either; Mavor expresses a similar sentiment

when she observes that while Alice (who changes sizes depending on what she consumes)

"greedily eats her way through Wonderland, Barrie's bird-fairy-child worlds are anorectically

driven, as if to eat is to grow is to die."[10]

Unfortunately, these oversimplified critical frameworks for comprehending the shifting

functions of scale are not limited to the *Alice* stories alone. To date, virtually every body of

criticism that examines miniature figures or oddly scaled worlds in children's fantasy also

perpetuates some version of the idea that smallness correlates with a degree of childish

perspective. Lucien L. Agosta, for instance, is certainly not unique in his assertion that a story

such as White's *Stuart Little* essentially offers young readers an outlet for their own anxieties

about living in a grownup world: "In featuring the minuscule…[*Stuart Little* appeals] to young

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[9] U.C. Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 10. Knoepflmacher is quoting Lewis Carroll, "Preface (Addressed to Any Mother)," in *The Nursery "Alice"* (New York: Dover, 1966), xxi-xxii.

[10] Mavor*, Reading Boyishly*, 283.

people who are themselves frequently reminded of their small statures in a world largely geared to the full grown, who are themselves intensely aware of the problems, perils, and occasional pleasures of living like a pygmy in a land of giants."[11] Even Perry Nodelman, whose contributions to the field of children's literature studies have been both formative and considerable, participates briefly in this belief when he observes of literary miniatureness: "So when these small beings prevail over insurmountable odds, as they always do, they represent a potent version of the wish-fulfillment fantasy: the very small can triumph over the dangerously large, the very powerless over the exceedingly powerful." [12]

The dangerous extremes to which such ideas concerning literary representations of size can be taken, however, are perhaps best illustrated through the work of Caroline C. Hunt, whose examination of small worlds and the miniature has become well known to any scholar who is interested in the idea of literary smallness. She begins with a problematic but familiar claim about tininess in children's literature, arguing that figures such as dwarves embody a kind of wrongly scaled subject with whom the child reader can readily identify: "To be a dwarf," she writes, "is to remain permanently at the disadvantage that children, literally, outgrow…In fiction, the dwarf or other single miniature character, usually presented as a very small adult, can articulate in adult language the humiliation and powerlessness felt by dwarf and child alike."[13] Hunt's analysis, however, goes even further: at the end of her study, she mentions an interview that she conducts on occasion with various readers, and explains in perfect earnestness: "First

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[11] Lucien L. Agosta, *E.B. White: The Children's Books* (New York: Twayne, 1995), 31.

[12] Perry Nodelman, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (New York: Longman, 1992), 199.

[13] Caroline C. Hunt, "Dwarf, Small World, Shrinking Child: Three Versions of Miniature," *Children's Literature* 23 (1995): 116.

question: Were you undersized as a child? (If not, the interview ends.) Second question: What were your favorite books? This highly unscientific poll, conducted over many years, suggests a high correlation between a sense of oneself as abnormally small and a fondness for books in which the hero or the whole society is diminutive; in fact, the word 'little' appears in the title of most of the books mentioned, even if there is no miniaturization in the book."[14] If Hunt's conclusion here appears premature (the question "Were you undersized as a child?" relies on a mode of psychoanalysis too far-reaching to be analytically meaningful), it also reveals a fundamental problem that scholars of children's literature frequently—and uniquely—face: namely, a readiness to oversimplify complex issues of scale into direct reflections of one's childhood experiences.

In order to move beyond these restrictive views of what authors achieve through their representations of scale in literary fantasy, I propose that we must first fundamentally reconsider the impulse to metaphorize representations of "the child" in children's literature. In her recent examination of Victorian-era conceptions of childhood, Gubar makes a compelling case for precisely this type of critical shift: she notably rejects the widely accepted assumption that what scholars often call the Golden Age of children's literature has produced many famous works of fantasies and yet "failed to engage with the complexities of contemporary life and promoted a static, highly idealized picture of childhood as a time of primitive simplicity."[15] Instead, she argues that authors such as Carroll and Barrie, among others, construct more diverse portraits of children and childhood than scholars have typically credited them for achieving—that, in other words, while children could be innocent, the Victorian authors did not necessarily subscribe to a

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[14] Hunt, "Dwarf, Small World, Shrinking Child," 132.

[15] Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, vii.

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Romantic idealization of childhood. (Many scholars—Paula T. Connolly, Peter Holland, and Carey Mickalites among them—continue to view the Romantic model of childhood as a significant influence on the works of Victorian-era writers, though this notion has become increasingly challenged within the current critical literature.)[16] As Michael Irwin has likewise observed of Carroll's writings: "The *Alice* books are centrally concerned with instability…Everyday assumptions about the workings of time, direction, language and personal identity are called into question."[17] By acknowledging that these authors deliberately address the "complexities of contemporary life" through their writing, scholars such as Gubar and Irwin have begun to establish more open discussions about the contemporaneous and intellectual scales that inform these works.

Other areas of scholarship, of course, have also addressed the relationship between the child and scale in ways that continue to expand the boundaries of current studies in children's literature. Among the most striking of these is the renewed critical discussion surrounding fairies and the nineteenth-century fairy tale, which was in many ways linked to contemporaneous advances in the fields of evolutionary theory and natural history. As Laura Forsberg explains, the tradition of children's fiction was by this point already and intricately connected to the world of fairies and fairytales: "Even as miniature fairies were painted with increasing realism, their diminished size seemed to place them in the child's world of nursery fantasies and not the adult

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[16] Paula T. Connolly, "The Marketing of Romantic Childhood: Milne, Disney, and a Very Popular Stuffed Bear," in *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuations, Postmodern Contestations*, ed. James Holt McGavran (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 188-207; Peter Holland, "The Play of Eros: Paradoxes of Gender in English Pantomime," *New Theatre Quarterly* 13, no. 51 (1997): 195-204; Carey Mickalites, "Fairies and a Flâneur: J. M. Barrie's Commercial Figure of the Child," *Criticism* 54, no. 1 (2012): 1-27.

[17] Michael Irwin, "*Alice*: Reflections and Relativities," in *Rereading Victorian Fiction*, ed. Alice Jenkins and Juliet John (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 115.

world of superstitious belief. Parents and educators alike agreed that fairy faith was a harmless belief for infants, one that would naturally pass away as the child grew older."[18] Among the number of authors who became interested in the scales of fairytales was Carroll himself, who— as Franziska E. Kohlt observes—was very much fascinated by telescopes and microscopes, scientific devices that revealed "hidden worlds of meaning, truths that lay hidden from the human eye. As auction catalogues reveal, by the time of his death Carroll had accumulated a sizeable collection of such technical instruments."[19]

As I discuss in the first chapter of my dissertation, this scientific interest reveals a key aspect of Carroll's intellectual inquiry concerning the figure of the child and discussions surrounding natural history, species, and the individual. Rose Lovell-Smith has written extensively on this particular intersection of Carroll's interests: according to her study, Alice's adventures through Wonderland are first and foremost an experiment in asserting "her sense of a securely *human* self" amid animals and environments that subject her constantly to their observation.[20] Nor is Lovell-Smith alone in this endeavor: in her examination of fairytales and Victorian natural history, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas likewise offers a rigorous and innovative framework for contextualizing Carroll's engagement with emerging scientific debates. Her study, which is both detailed and comprehensive, leads her to conclude that Alice's "obsession with size throughout her journeys points to the narratives' interest in questions of scale…[Carroll's tale] encapsulates debates revolving around representations of nature at a time when such

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[18] Laura Forsberg, "Nature's Invisibilia: The Victorian Microscope and the Miniature Fairy," *Victorian Studies* 57, no. 4 (2015): 647.

[19] Franziska E. Kohlt, "'The Stupidest Tea-Party in All My Life': Lewis Carroll and Victorian Psychiatric Practice," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 21, no. 2 (2016): 148.

[20] Rose Lovell-Smith, "Eggs and Serpents: Natural History References in Lewis Carroll's Scene of Alice and the Pigeon," *Children's Literature* 35 (2007): 39.

definitions were changing, especially with the popularization of evolutionary theory."[21] As the focused methodology that informs observations such as Lovell-Smith and Talairach-Vielamas's suggest, the idea of resituating fantasy narratives such as Carroll's within their contemporaneous intellectual contexts is by no means an unfamiliar one, and has in fact yielded some of the most compelling analyses in the field of children's literature studies.

It is important to note here, however, that Carroll remains one of the few authors to have gained such significant critical consideration for his academic, historical, and scientific contributions through the category of children's fantasy. While the reasons for this disproportionate attention remain unclear, it can be traced at least in part to the large body of scholarship that continues to be mired in conversations about childishness, particularly with respect to the authors who composed these works of children's fantasy. In her study of Barrie, for instance, Mavor rearticulates this critical commonplace, labeling Barrie as a "boy eternal" and a fairy whose magical roots allowed him to fashion for himself a world as charming and frozen as Neverland.[22] Jackie Wullschläger, whose book *Inventing Wonderland* continues to be read widely within the field, expresses this belief even more forcefully when she writes in her analysis of authors such as Carroll, Barrie, and Milne: "It is as if each writer needed a child as muse to trigger the adult imagination into creating an extraordinary fantasy. Once locked into this magical world, however, each drew on his own peculiarly strong affinity with childhood."[23] Authors of children's literature, these studies would seem to suggest, are adept at their trade by

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[21] Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Fairy Tales, Natural History and Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 44.

[22] Mavor, *Reading Boyishly*, 174-75.

[23] Jackie Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland: The Lives and Fantasies of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J.M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame and A.A. Milne* (London: Methuen, 1995), 5.

virtue of being boyish, childish, or in some way unusually connected to their inner youthful spirits.

To understand some of the most canonical works of children's fantasy as mere products of biographical circumstance or psychoanalytical convenience, however, is to discount the significant intellectual and literary histories in which these stories inevitably participate. While Carroll is perhaps the most critically studied of the authors that I have selected here, he was certainly not the only one to be fascinated by the intersection of fantastic scales and contemporaneous academic issues (though he of course played a foundational role in immortalizing this tradition). As I suggest in my present study, other notable writers of children's fantasy—including Barrie, Milne, and White—are in many ways also captivated by discourses about the incongruent scales of the stories that they tell. This connection enables us to understand in part, for instance, the reasons for which stories about impossible smallness (such as White's miniature protagonist Stuart Little) or seemingly isolated worlds (such as Barrie's Neverland and Milne's Hundred Acre Wood) are so frequently characterized by proliferating scales of imaginative possibility as well. In his *Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard offers a useful starting point for reconciling this apparent paradox by observing that smallness can in fact serve as an unlikely portal for infinite expansion: "Large issues from small," he points out, "not through the logical law of a dialectics of contraries, but thanks to liberation from all obligations of dimensions, a liberation that is a special characteristic of the activity of the imagination."[24] This understanding of space allows us to reconsider the types of claim made by Colin Manlove and other scholars, for instance, that fantasy literature in the 1890s was "largely playful and escapist," and only by the 1960s truly portrayed fantastic elements "invading the 'real world,'

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[24] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 154-55.

rather than being boxed off or isolated from it."[25]

To this end, all four of the authors I have selected for this study highlight the unique potential of children's fantasy: their writings share the sense that seemingly self-enclosed worlds of fantasy can serve as bridges to a much vaster world of intellectual possibility. This bridging function is possible in part because, as Brian Attebery notes, fantasy narrates events that have never happened with the full confidence of linguistic assertion: "We might say that the fantastic is the use of the verb forms of reporting for events that in ordinary discourse would require more conditional forms. Rather than saying, 'If only I had wings,' the fantastic asserts that I do."[26] The narrative certainty that fantasy implies is especially crucial to the projects of writers such as Carroll, Barrie, Milne, and White: it allows them to investigate the very structures according to which their own narratives and intellectual inquiries are made possible, and in doing so to cognize questions about the real world in ways that cannot be achieved through theoretical or scientific discourse alone. In a similar vein, Jack Zipes has pointed out: "The other world of fantasy enables us to gain distance from our own world and its conventions ironically so that we can become better acquainted with our own world and perhaps change it, after experiencing the other world to which we are removed by the literary work."[27] In other words, fantasy is powerful because it both offers a new perspective from which to view the world and reshapes our preconceptions about the world in tangible ways, thus allowing new ideas to emerge through the

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[25] Colin Manlove, *From Alice to Harry Potter: Children's Fantasy in England*, (Christchurch: Cybereditions, 2003), 36, 99.

[26] Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 6.

[27] Jack Zipes, "The Age of Commodified Fantasticism: Reflections of Children's Literature and the Fantastic," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1984-85): 189.

act of fantastic storytelling. (Or, as Attebery aptly observes: "Writers are making use of the fantastic to investigate the way narrative, in a two-way partnership between speaker and listener like that of language, creates the realities it seems merely to reflect."[28])

For these authors, then, fantasy serves as a means through which the scales of the world around them are rendered more accessible and comprehensible, though by no means more simplistic. This last view, in particular, is one that has encountered surprising resistance from critics who study this body of work: too often in its attempts to define what actually constitutes "children's fantasy," existing scholarship has reinforced rather than interrogated the binary between adulthood and childhood, between readers that will appreciate certain sophisticated or intelligent jokes and others that will not. This dichotomizing tendency is a problematic one that continues to beleaguer scholars in the field, and is worth noting briefly here for further context.

On (Not) Defining Children's Literature: A Note on the Difficulty of Genre

Up until this point, I have avoided discussing the category of children's literature at any great length—but no extensive study would be complete without a note on the reasons for this silence. As scholars have acknowledged, the problem of generic definition plays a central role in studies of childhood and children's literature, whether from the perspective of literary critics or the more scientific vantage point of cognitive psychologists. While the term "children's literature" has been widely debated and defined across disciplines, however, it is safe to say that no single definition adequately encompasses the infinite connotations that the term evokes. In his survey of the field, Hunt explains some of the major problems contingent on defining the

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[28] Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy*, 53.

parameters of such a tenuous category:

> Children's literature seems at first sight to be a simple idea: books written for children, books read by children. But in theory and in practice it is vastly more complicated than that. Just to unpack that definition: what does *written for* mean? Surely the intention of the author is not a very reliable guide, not to mention the intention of the publisher—or even the format of the book?...Then again, *read by*: surely sometime…somewhere, all books have been read by one child or another?...And do we mean *read by* voluntarily or, as it were, under duress in the classroom? And can we say that a child can really read, in the sense of realizing the same spectrum of meanings as the adult can?[29]

Despite Hunt's apt summary of this generic difficulty, some scholars have continued to persist in the view that a single, easily definable explanation of this body of literature does in fact exist. In his examination of the tradition of British children's fantasy, for instance, Manlove reaffirms this impulse when he observes matter-of-factly: "As for *children's* fantasy, it is fantasy either written or published for a child readership up to eighteen, and which some children have read, whether voluntarily or not."[30]

Even so, recent criticism has become more attuned on the whole to the problems inherent in such oversimplified designations, which have become one of the most divisive issues in the field today. By way of addressing these difficulties, for instance, Nodelman has suggested that the children's novel "is, in fact, a distinct type of fiction, a kind that we recognize even when

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[29] Peter Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4-5.

[30] Manlove, *From Alice to Harry Potter*, 11.

cannot put our fingers on what is special about it."[31] This lack of critical consensus is important

to contextualize further here, for it also reveals why the discourse surrounding children's

literature remains overwhelmingly entrenched in discussions surrounding the child in particular,

often at the cost of overlooking broader (though equally compelling) areas of scholarly interest.

In response to the ambiguity of this category, for example, Jacqueline Rose has famously

asserted that children's fiction sets up the child as a way of exploring impossible questions of

sexuality; in doing so, such fiction fulfills adults' desires to construe "the child as the object of

its speech" by securing the child and making the child a knowable, innocent part of language.[32]

Rose's study remains as well-known in the field of children's literature studies as it has been

controversial, not least of all because it positions "the child" as an unknowable construct, nothing

more than a projection of unanswerable adult desires. Her approach, as Fox Paul observes, is also

problematic because it assumes—without substantial support—that the "barriers between child

and adult are always already intact," when these categories are themselves constantly

renegotiated by the narratives that invoke them.[33]

By contrast, Hunt attempts to circumvent this difficulty of definition by identifying the

target audience of children's literature, or what he designates as the "implied reader." "In any

text," Hunt observes, "the tone or features of the narrative voice imply what kind of reader—in

terms of knowledge or attitude—is addressed, what kind of attention the book is requesting, and

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[31] Nodelman, "Defining Children's Literature," *Children's Literature* 8 (1980): 184.

[32] Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan*, 2.

[33] Fox Paul, "Other Maps Showing Through: The Liminal Identities of Neverland," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2007): 255.

what the relationship of the narrator and the reader is assumed to be."[34] Although Hunt's

approach is a useful one, the category of the implied reader (a term borrowed from the theory of

Wolfgang Iser) still fixates on the category of the child reader and raises its own set of questions,

especially with respect to the problem of intentionality.[35] As Paul notes, this idea also reinforces

the problematic concept of an adult-child binary, which has become something of a critical

commonplace and perpetuates the idea that these texts must appeal to particular readerships in

order to be effective or generically accurate. (In a fairly typical claim, for instance, John

Morgenstern expresses this form of dualistic thinking when he refers to age-based reactions to

slapstick humor in children's cartoons: "Parents who do not get the joke think this is violence,

but the child who laughs understands that the cartoon is playing with dynamite."[36])

To complicate matters further is the problem of that which constitutes children's fantasy.

"Fantasy," as Nodelman observes, "is many different things, including both *Alice in Wonderland*

and *Lord of the Rings*. It is so many different things that attempts to define it seem rather

pointless. And that is particularly true when it comes to children's fiction. Much of it is fantasy,

and much of it isn't; but all of it is clearly different from adult fiction."[37] As Nodelman makes

clear, the current standards for defining fantasy are vague at best and not possible to dwell on at

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[34] Hunt, *Introduction to Children's Literature*, 12. Here, Hunt's framework is also indebted to Aidan Chambers' delineation of three major modes of address in children's books: "single address" (targeting child readers), "double address" (targeting children, but offering private knowledge that is shared with adults), and "dual address" (primarily for children but satisfactory for adults) ("The Reader in the Book: Notes from Work in Progress," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly, 1978 Proceedings* [1978]: 1-19).

[35] See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

[36] John Morgenstern, "Children and Other Talking Animals," *Lion and the Unicorn* 24, no. 1 (2000): 119.

[37] Nodelman, "Defining Children's Literature," 187.

length here—but it is also this indefinable, transformative quality that renders so many works of children's fantasy particularly well-adapted to cognizing many different scales of storytelling and world-building at once. As Maria Nikolajeva observes, fantasy is "an eclectic genre under evolution," one which borrows its tropes from myth, romance, science fiction, the novel of chivalry, and countless other areas of literature.[38] This borrowing model of fantasy is exceptionally important for understanding writers such as Barrie, whose *Peter Pan* stories drew some of their most distinctive features from genres and tropes as diverse as the fairytale, Harlequinade, pantomime, the adventure story, and the island narrative, among others. Whatever the critical consensus (or lack thereof), it therefore remains clear that the difficulty of defining fantasy and its metamorphic elements also constitutes in many ways the appeal of this genre for the authors that I study.

The aim of my current research, however, is not to delineate these categories in detail—nor am I primarily interested in adopting a single approach to resolving these difficult questions of classification and readership. Instead, by laying out these discussions I hope to have illuminated some of the obstacles that have prevented the field as a whole from expanding very far beyond its considerable preoccupation with issues of self-definition, childhood, and genre. To this end, the goal of my inquiry is to bridge the ostensibly distinct realm of children's literature, on the one hand, with the intellectually stimulating conversations that drive each author's uniquely scaled vision for storytelling and narrative creation, on the other hand. For this reason, I have selected works whose largely undisputed statuses as canonical literature for children allows me to conduct a fairly direct study of the ways in which literary fantasy has grappled with problems of intellectual scale, while eschewing the issues of genre that habitually hinder such

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[38] Maria Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* (London: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 139.

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inquiries. As I discuss in more detail in the following section, these works also offer a useful panoply of perspectives concerning the ways in which authors attempt to engage broader questions of philosophical, scientific, social, and political scale through their literary fantasy.

From Carroll to White: Four Approaches to Recalibrating Intellectual Scale

As I have mentioned, Carroll's *Alice* stories occupy a fairly unique position within the canon of children's literature studies. Analyzed endlessly by mathematicians, linguists, logicians, philosophers, scholars of Victorian literature, and enthusiasts alike, these two novels have become acknowledged as complex works that employ fantasy elements in order to engage with important intellectual debates of the nineteenth century. Nor is it particularly difficult to imagine these literary classics in this capacity: Carroll, as Elizabeth Sewell points out in her seminal study of nonsense, showed an eclectic interest throughout his lifetime in game structures, duality, base numbers, series and repetition, symbolic logic, numerical scales, riddles, and a virtually inexhaustable list of other academic topics.[39] In his notes to *The Annotated Alice* (originally published in 1983), Martin Gardner likewise finds no difficulty in offering extensive commentary on the contemporaneous historical and academic contexts that inform many of the *Alice* stories' most complex moments.[40] What is perhaps more remarkable, however, is the extent to which this idea concerning the serious nature of Carroll's intellectual inquiry remains unapplied to other established works of children's fantasy, which express similar levels of such engagement but rarely receive a fraction of the serious critical attention that *Alice's Adventures*

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[39] Elizabeth Sewell, *The Field of Nonsense* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952).

[40] Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll, Illustrated by John Tenniel*, ed. Martin Gardner (New York: Bramhall, 1960).

in Wonderland and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871) have earned over the years. To this end, the aim of this dissertation is to make a more holistic case for the necessity of analyzing these works in the context of the larger political, scientific, cultural, and linguistic debates that shape them.

In my first chapter, I set out to demonstrate the implications of Carroll's forays into Victorian natural history and structures of play, both of which are crucial to understanding the depth of his engagement with contemporaneous scientific and cultural thought. What interests me in particular about Carroll's first novel is the way in which its young protagonist must navigate a series of ill-fitting experiences in Wonderland that raise questions about her unique identity, much in the spirit of biologist Herbert Spencer's questions concerning "the biological individual" (as opposed to the "species," as in evolutionary theories posited by Charles Darwin, among others).[41] The second half of this first chapter shifts focus to *Through the Looking-Glass*, which highlights the game structures of chess in order to demonstrate the limitations of Victorian ethnocentricism. In particular, I maintain that Carroll's well-placed references to the international histories of chess, coupled with his satirical commentary on emerging Anglo-Saxon studies, enable him to imagine his fantasy world on an increasingly global scale. By the end of this chapter, I also hope to have established a framework for understanding the *Alice* stories as exemplary rather than exceptional in their treatment of serious worldly topics, in a way that allows us to interrogate more productively the intellectual scales according to which children's fantasy as a category operates. In other words, this chapter offers a foundation for the types of critical questions that have proven so productive in existing examinations of Carroll's writing,

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[41] See Herbert Spencer, "Principles of Biology," in *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Laura Otis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909).

and that I seek to apply to my own examinations of Barrie, Milne, and White as well.

In this spirit, my second chapter concentrates on Barrie's *Peter Pan* stories, which employ important elements of physical and developmental rescaling in order to cognize important nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideas concerning narrative creation. By drawing attention to oddly scaled figures of storytelling such as Irene and Liza (a servant described as being "so small that when she says she will never see ten again one can scarcely believe her"), I suggest that these childish characters are not, as Wullschläger suggests, mere remnants of Barrie's "boyish" nature and inspiration. [42] Rather, they represent Barrie's longstanding interest in the nebulous origins of stories: through these characters, he suggests that ideal authorship is often located in incongruous figures who—by virtue of their betwixt-and-betweeness—can navigate a variety of genres and narrative histories with ease.[43] In doing so, Barrie actually recalibrates the scale of narrative to include even the most unlikely authors, regardless of class, education, or childlike status—a fact that resonated deeply with the author himself (who revised endlessly and collaborated extensively on his stories with the Llewelyn Davies boys).

In my third chapter, I analyze the ways in which Milne's verse and fiction for children participate in important philosophical debates concerning modern models of language and education. This intellectual engagement is most clearly expressed in a playful poem titled "Teddy Bear" (1924), which directly parodies the ordinary language theories of philosophers such as Bertrand Russell. Russell, it is important to note, researched and lectured on mathematics

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[42] Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland*, 126. "*Peter Pan*," Wullschläger declares, "is a wish-fulfilment story about the triumph of youth over age which caught the mood of the new young century." Barrie, she adds, was "a single, boyish man in charge of five lost boys [the Llewelyn Davies brothers]" (135).

[43] J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, ed. Peter Hollindale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 103.

at Trinity College, Cambridge during a period when Milne had matriculated at the same college; this largely unexamined overlap between the two thinkers is critical to my framing of Milne's engagement with philosophies of language and logic. As I demonstrate, Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) features a variety of communal meaning-making that emphasizes actual, unconventional uses of language and resists the types of abstraction that characterized Russell's theories of definite description and proper naming. In my examination of the book's sequel, *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928), I further suggest that this community-oriented approach is vital to Milne's vision for a democratic forest, which in many ways draws from and reconsiders the educational philosophy of important social reformers such as John Dewey.

My fourth chapter continues this discussion of global democracy, though through the very different lens of White's *Stuart Little* (1945). In this final chapter, I argue that Stuart's tiny size enables him to view New York City through an unconventional perspective that sees littleness and largeness as complementary parts of a whole. Through attention to the most minute city details, and later by adopting Margalo's holistic bird's-eye view, Stuart works constantly to transform an overwhelming urban encounter into an accessible, aesthetically valuable experience. In doing so, his story not only resonates with one of White's most famous publications, "Here Is New York" (1949), which describes New York as "the loftiest of cities" whose "full meaning will always remain illusive" to New Yorkers; it also offers a fantastic reimagining of White's political, wartime *Wild Flag* essays, which referred to New York as "a world government on a small scale" and called for a federalized global postwar government.[44]

These discussions continue to take on a new form in White's second novel for children,

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[44] E.B. White, "Here is New York," in *Empire City: New York Through the Centuries*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson and David S. Dunbar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 700; White, *Wild Flag: Editorials from* The New Yorker *on Federal World Government and Other Matters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946), xii.

Charlotte's Web, which is similarly concerned with the postwar American political climate but initially less optimistic in its vision for democratic change. In this work, Charlotte—a spider that thinks critically and writes well—learns to leverage her skills in order to interrupt the cycles of rural routine and mindless murder that characterize animal life on a human family's farm. By placing this narrative in dialogue with White's postwar essays (including, notably, one piece titled "Death of a Pig" [1948]), I suggest that a new ideal for democratic leadership emerges through this novel, this time in alignment with the type of private art and expression that Charlotte practices. By resituating *Stuart Little* and *Charlotte's Web* in the context of White's nonfiction essays, this chapter thus interrogates the critical commonplace that such stories serve as mere metaphors for childhood exploration. In its place, my analysis demonstrates that it is necessary to examine closely the continuity across White's writing for both adults and children in order to appreciate fully the political and historical complexity of his characters' scaled perspectives.

Studied as a whole and in their respective historical contexts, I maintain that the works that I have selected reveal a more cohesive, nuanced representation of intellectual inquiry than previous scholarship has tended to allow. By extension, these stories also enable us to broaden our understanding of the field of children's fantasy, which has heretofore remained limited to a very specific set of preconceptions concerning childishness and "the child." Although Carroll, Barrie, Milne, and White are all very different writers, they share the undeniable sense that by recalibrating constantly the scales of their literary fantasies, they can also better reimagine the processes and ideas by which their eclectic narratives come to fruition. Through this dissertation, I therefore suggest that the continuity between children's fantasy and contemporaneous academic debates is absolutely vital to understanding the enduring influence of the former, as well as to

creating a more interrogative model for future examinations of this body of literature.

Chapter One

Expanding Worlds: Microscopic Landscapes and Global Histories

in Carroll's *Alice* Books

Since the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871), Lewis Carroll's best-known novels have become immortalized in the popular imagination as classic works of children's fantasy. In those intervening years, these two texts have garnered an impressive array of serious critical attention: with approaches harkening from disciplines as diverse as psychoanalysis and the philosophy of language, there is certainly no shortage of scholarship that claims to offer us a new way to think critically about the author's considerable intellectual achievements.

Some of these studies are now well known within the field of Carrollian criticism. Nina Auerbach, for instance, helped shift the critical discourse toward a sharper recognition of Carroll's eclectic, academic background when she asserted: "Despite critical attempts to psychoanalyze Charles Dodgson through the writings of Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was too precise a logician and too controlled an artist to confuse his own dream with that of his character."[1] One might also consider the substantial contribution of Elizabeth Sewell's book *The Field of Nonsense* (1952), which establishes an important lexicon for thinking about Carroll's contributions to the branches of logic and linguistic nonsense. (In her book, she lends particular clarity to the term "nonsense" by defining it simply as "a collection of words or events which in their arrangement do not fit into some recognized system in a particular

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[1] Nina Auerbach, "Alice and Wonderland: A Curious Child," *Victorian Studies* 17, no. 1 (1973): 32.

mind."[2]) Her study has laid out the critical groundwork for many subsequent scholars who have

likewise become preoccupied by these features of Carroll's writing, among them Jean-Jacques

Lecercle (whose *Philosophy through the Looking Glass* [1985] critically examines the

relationships among language, nonsense, and desire) and James A. Williams, who highlights the

important connection between Carroll and influential philosophers of language of his day. (As

Williams usefully observes: "The coincidences of Carroll's arrival in Oxford with the upswing of

[German philosopher Max Müller's] career, and of his most productive decades with the zenith

of Oxford's philological reputation, ties his nonsense writings to a crucial time and place in the

history of language study in England."[3]) Both in and beyond the realm of literary studies, the

sheer body of critical literature inspired by the *Alice* stories has proliferated to an extent that is

certainly too expansive to enumerate fully here.[4] It is worth noting, however, that these existing

discussions—unlike those which surround most other works of children's literature—have had

almost no difficulty locating Carroll's fantasy stories within a broader tradition of linguistic,

logical, mathematical, and philosophical significance.

Even so, there has been something consistently polarizing about many of these treatments

of intellectual inquiry in the *Alice* stories, on the one hand, and the unique form of children's

fantasy as a mode of telling ideas, on the other hand. More often than not, one approach seems to

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[2] Elizabeth Sewell, *The Field of Nonsense* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952), 3.

[3] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy through the Looking Glass* (La Salle: Open Court, 1985); James A. Williams, "Lewis Carroll and the Private Life of Words," *Review of English Studies* 64, no. 266 (2013): 652.

[4] See Morton N. Cohen, "Lewis Carroll and the Education of Victorian Women," in *Sexuality and Victorian Literature*, ed. Don Richard Cox (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 3-19; James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Karoline Leach, *In the Shadow of the Dreamchild: The Myth and Reality of Lewis Carroll* (London: Peter Owen, 2009).

necessitate the exclusion of the other: take, for example, Sarah Wise's recent examination of

madness in Victorian England, which pauses to speculate about whether the author's uncle

Robert Wilfred Skeffington Lutwidge (a commissioner in Lunacy) might have influenced

Carroll's poem *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876) and helped transform it into "a parable of the

Lunacy Commissioners, with 'The Bellman' representing [Anthony Ashley Cooper, 7th Earl of

Shaftesbury]."[5] A similar impulse drives the work of Ruth Murphy, who regards Alice's frequent

changes in size as the product of "Darwinian Nature" (embodied by Wonderland) but also

concludes that Carroll "did not deal directly with the evolutionary arguments raging through

society in his fiction for children."[6] These tendencies—to either look for the biographical

analogues behind Carroll's engagement with intellectual ideas or distance his stories from the

elements of children's fantasy that illuminate these issues—continue to characterize most critical

attempts to position Carroll as a serious thinker and writer.

 This divisive methodology, moreover, goes both ways: within the field of children's

literature studies, for example, an overwhelming emphasis on the childish spirit and traditions of

Carroll's stories frequently overshadows the author's considerable contributions to

contemporaneous intellectual debates. Jan Susina's recent book, *The Place of Lewis Carroll in*

Children's Literature (2010), in some ways exemplifies this desire to reclaim Carroll as an

author of children's literature and resituate his literary reputation squarely within this tradition.

As Susina notes: "This book…is not *The Place of Lewis Carroll in Adult Literature*, which is a

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[5] Sarah Wise, *Inconvenient People: Lunacy, Liberty, and the Mad-Doctors in England* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2012), 81.

[6] Ruth Murphy, "Darwin and 1860s Children's Literature: Belief, Myth or Detritus," *Journal of Literature and Science* 5, no.2 (2012): 14, 16.

very different topic. Nevertheless, the *Alice* books appeal to both children and adult readers."[7]

Although approaches such as Susina's offer important frameworks for understanding the

contributions that Carroll made to a specific body of literature, they also tend to reinforce rather

than interrogate the apparent dichotomy that critics have imposed on the seriousness of

intellectual engagement and the playfulness of children's fantasy.

In this chapter, I argue that both of these elements not only coexist in Carroll's *Alice*

stories but actually work together to achieve a level of intense inquiry that other forms of writing

alone could not. In other words, fantasy—and particularly the brand of transformative children's

fantasy employed by Carroll—is integral rather than incidental to the narratives that the author

constructs around certain nineteenth-century intellectual debates. In the first half of my chapter, I

examine the ways in which Wonderland embodies a dynamic fantasy space that puts pressure on

the boundaries of scientific theory in order to reimagine conventional, linear, and largely

teleological Victorian models of child development. At its core, Carroll's novel foregrounds a

young protagonist whose frequent changes in size—and the confusion in taxonomy and self-

identification that these changes engender—are responsive, fluid, and in constant dialogue with

scientific inquiries about the relationship between the development of species and the individual

child. Even though Alice's changes appear to embody a form of remarkable adaptability, I argue

that these abrupt transformations might be more productively viewed as a type of fantastic

Carrollian rescaling: a rescaling that compresses both the temporality (growth and shrinkage that

is instantaneous rather than durational) as well as the breadth (shifts in size that affect the

immediate individual rather than hypothetical ancestors or offspring) of evolutionary thought.

Through this type of imaginative recalibration, Carroll's vision of childhood development

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[7] Jan Susina, *The Place of Lewis Carroll in Children's Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 4.

stresses several elements that his contemporaries had widely dismissed as irrelevant to the scale of evolutionary thinking: namely, the importance of a child's experiential fluidity and individual identity in the process of growing up.

In the second half of this chapter, I consider the ways in which Carroll expands his vision of the individual child's relationship to her environment by resituating Alice in the context of debates surrounding British ethnocentricism, linguistic evolution, and global histories. The author achieves this in part by creating a mirror-image world based on a giant chessboard, which is central to Carroll's exploration of the links among social play, international game structures, and language. His fascination with the social nature of linguistic play, in particular, raises important discussions about Alice's relationship to the world that she inhabits; this time, her position as a product of the English school system actually limits her worldview and prevents her from understanding fully the nonlinear global histories that characterize a fantasy realm such as the Looking-glass world. To this effect, Carroll's recurrent jokes about Anglo-Saxon (a field of interest that gained significant popular and academic attention throughout the Victorian era) raise highly proximate issues about the problems of British ethnocentricism, which had been discussed at length by nineteenth century philologists such as Müller and became an especially fraught issue within the Oxford linguistics community. (It is, more specifically, through Alice's encounters with fantastic characters such as the Lion, Unicorn, and elephants that Carroll perhaps most poignantly highlights the parallels between the shifting games that Alice plays in the Looking-Glass world and the increasingly unstable global histories in which she finds herself entangled.) Ultimately, I argue that these experiences prepare Alice to navigate a new type of fantasy world, one that is filled with endless opportunities for (and productive discussions about the nature of) dynamic change. In turn, these literary explorations underscore Carroll's vision for

rendering ideas about the world more intelligible through transformative fantasy—a vision, moreover, that would become vital to the types of expansion and intellectual engagement that appear in subsequent works of children's fantasy as well.

1. The Changing Spaces of Wonderland:

Rescaling Development and Childhood Identity in *Alice in Wonderland*

The publication of *Alice in Wonderland* signaled a now well-known departure from most early nineteenth-century treatments of childhood identity. Famous for its nonsensical playfulness and fantastic narrative, the novel presented Victorian readers with a young protagonist whose non-predictive experiences of physical growth empower her to navigate a chaotic and often unforgiving landscape, though frequently at the cost of her individual identity. Subjected to the scrutiny of Wonderland creatures and forced constantly to reconsider her status as a "little girl," Alice and her readers alike must fundamentally reimagine what it means to be—or become—an individual human child in the first place.

Carroll's interest in the interplay between environments and the human has led scholars such as Morton N. Cohen, Murphy, and Rasheed Tazudeen to examine the influence of evolutionary thinking on the author's first novel, particularly that which Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and other major scientific figures inspired in Victorian England. While *Alice in Wonderland* is certainly absorbed by these questions of species, growth, and development, however, there is also a crucial way of understanding the novel that connects what many critics have taken to be Carroll's interest in evolutionary thought, broadly, to the author's fascination with the individual development and identity of his child protagonist, specifically. My analysis

of this novel suggests that Carroll deliberately confines his narrative to Alice's adventures through an enclosed fantasy world such as Wonderland in order to expand paradoxically the scope of existing debates surrounding child development and account for meaningful, individual variability as well. In doing so, he creates a narrative that privileges an individual's multi-directionality over measured scientific genealogy; imaginative storytelling and labels over fixity of meaning; and, above all, the ability for a young protagonist such as Alice to continue navigating the rescaled space between childhood and adulthood, without sacrificing the wonder of either.

This section is structured according to three primary areas of thought. In the first part of this section, I situate *Alice* in the context of well-known nineteenth-century debates concerning the development of species, specifically those theories that emphasized the teleology of evolutionary and genealogical timelines. Alice's many non-predictive transformations, I argue, not only engage with Darwinian and Spencerian discourses; they also allow Carroll to highlight the highly unclassifiable nature of Alice's quest to maintain a clear sense of self-identity amid an unforgiving, taxonomy-driven landscape. The inability of existing evolutionary discourse to represent the singular child's experience of growth in turn generates an important shift in Carroll's narrative. In the second subsection, I analyze the ways in which Alice's alternately microscopic and macroscopic perspectives, on the one hand, and her increasingly empathetic responsiveness to the environments that she encounters, on the other hand, suggest that she occupies an uneasy position within the tradition of natural history. In particular, I focus on the tension between Alice as an individual girl and the idea of the "little girl" as a sort of mislabeled species. Carroll's interest in natural history—a field of study that gained significant traction among the scientific community in the early nineteenth century—illuminates the power of

observation and classification throughout Wonderland but ultimately also fails to encompass completely Alice's classificatory fluidity. In the third and final subsection, I therefore examine how Alice's readiness to interrogate the forms of classification and misnaming imposed upon her by many of the Wonderland creatures opens up a space of generative linguistic growth, in which her assertion of her individual identity through language (particularly the use of proper names) allows her to interact productively with her surroundings while maintaining a sense of distinctiveness from them. Together, these elements rescale Wonderland into a space of open, generative dynamism that fosters its child protagonist's growth and understanding of natural environments without undermining the singularity of her developmental experience.

Evolutionary Thought and Carroll's Non-Teleological Model of Child Development

Carroll's preoccupation with the development of children was a familiar one in the world of Victorian publishing, though his literary treatment of them was not necessarily so. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, many naturalists and biologists argued that the entire history of human development was predicated on (and would continue to tend toward) higher progress. Though certainly not all scientists subscribed to this model of evolution, some studies that were of particular interest to Carroll—such as Robert Chambers' anonymously published *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844)—invoked the commonplace idea of a growing child to explain more abstract reflections on evolutionary history and the development of the human species. Chambers' work, for instance, implored readers to consider the similarities between a boy's maturation into manhood and the development of the universe, despite the latter's empirical inscrutability:

If we could suppose a number of persons of various ages presented to the inspection of an intelligent being newly introduced into the world, we cannot doubt that he would soon become convinced that men had once been boys, that boys had once been infants, and finally, that all had been brought into the world in exactly the same circumstances. Precisely thus, seeing in our astral system many thousands of worlds in all stages of formation, from the most rudimental to that immediately preceding the present condition of those we deem perfect, it is unavoidable to conclude that all the perfect have gone through the various stages which we see in the rudimental.[8]

Like several other important contemporaneous evolutionary thinkers that Carroll's *Alice* novel considers, Chambers viewed the child's development as an observable, linear, and stage-based process that could be conveniently appropriated to illuminate otherwise unobservable phenomena. Proponents of recapitulation theory—a popular branch of scientific thought that likened ontogeny, or the individual organism's origins and development, to phylogeny, the evolutionary history of the organism—adopted a similar approach. In *The Evolution of Man* (1874), Ernst Haeckel compared the human individual's upward growth to the species' entire evolutionary development: "The series of forms through which the Individual Organism passes during its progress from the egg cell to its fully developed state," he explained, "is a brief, compressed reproduction of the long series of forms through which the animal ancestors of that organism (or the ancestral forms of its species) have passed from the earliest periods of so-called organic creation down to the present time."[9] Haeckel's representation of recapitulation lengthens

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[8] Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (London: John Churchill, 1844), 20.

[9] Ernst Haeckel, "The Evolution of Man," in *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Laura Otis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 294.

considerably the span of the developmental process, positioning the individual as only one in a

series of endlessly reproducible progressions toward a definite teleology: the present moment.

Nor was his writing unique in this respect: in both his work and others published throughout the

century, scientists repeatedly drew attention to the model of the growing child in order to

validate their observations about the evolving natural world that they inhabited.[10]

While I suggest in the analysis that follows that Carroll's novel resists these highly

durational and teleologically-minded models of development, there were other aspects of

evolutionary theory that inform directly both the author's fantasy world and his protagonist. The

most important of these concerned adaptability and the function of individual variation on a

genealogical scale, topics that are discussed at length in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of*

Species (1859).What is particularly well-known about this work is the idea, according to Darwin,

that the development of species depends almost entirely on chance and environmental

adaptability based on individual variability; in particular, his theory of evolution stresses

Nature's fundamentally chaotic nature and the continued survival of those species that pass down

the most advantageous traits to their offspring. But it is noticeable that in contrast to supporters

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[10] While Chambers and Haeckel represent two of the best-known examples of scientific theorists who liken the child's (linear) development to the overall trajectory of evolutionary change, it is worth noting here that these ideas represent a subset rather than the entirety of scientific discourse concerning evolution and human development. As Sally Shuttleworth points out, Darwin's 1877 article titled "A Biographical Sketch of an Infant" is frequently viewed as the beginnings of British scientific interest in child development, specifically (*The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 221). Of particular interest are Darwin's detailed notes on the behaviors of a single young child (his infant son), which are recorded with a level of depth that Carroll's 1865 novel in many ways anticipates—though the latter, unlike Darwin, clearly stresses the importance of imaginative perspectives over strictly empirical observation. By bringing together a dynamic natural environment such as Wonderland, on the one hand, and a sharp focus on the unconventional growth patterns of his child protagonist, on the other hand, Carroll's narrative envisions a framework for child developmental study in which evolutionary understandings of environment and the individual child's growth are complementary parts of the same debates concerning development, rather than distinct threads of scientific thought.

of recapitulation theory such as Chambers and Haeckel, Darwin's use of terms such as "offspring" and "descendants" remains markedly distanced from the human child, even at a metaphoric level. Only once in *The Origin*, during his discussion of delayed manifestations of individual variability, does he directly invoke children as an analogy for understanding evolutionary development: "It is notorious that breeders of cattle, horses and various fancy animals, cannot positively tell, until some time after birth, what will be the merits and demerits of their young animals. We see this plainly in our own children; we cannot tell whether a child will be tall or short, or what its precise features will be. The question is not, at what period of life any variation may have been caused, but at what period the effects are displayed."[11] Here, Darwin uses "our children" as a familiar point of reference that guides his readers in understanding his larger point about animal traits. The child's individual development, however, while interesting to Darwin, is also irrelevant to his theory of natural selection, since what matters in a genealogical timeline is the heritable variability from parent to child, rather than the individual organism itself. Unlike the theories of biologists such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Darwin's conception of evolution therefore does not allow for individual will and emphasizes instead what he termed the "Struggle for Existence," or the "dependence of one being on another, and including (which is more important) not only the life of the individual, but success in leaving progeny."[12]

Not surprisingly, these familiar schools of thought about the development of the individual and species became the subject of critical scrutiny in contemporaneous works of fiction such as Carroll's, especially since—as Gillian Beer has observed—nineteenth-century

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[11] Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909), 483.

[12] Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 78.

literary and scientific discourses were closely intertwined.[13] In this regard, one of the best-known

examples in children's literature is Charles Kingsley, an author with whose writing Carroll was

intimately familiar and who may well have inversely encouraged the disruptive portrait of

childhood growth that Alice embodies in Wonderland. In *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a*

Land Baby (1863), the English clergyman—who was one of Darwin's closest correspondents—

grapples directly with the relationships among a child's growth, individual identity, and

evolutionary theory. His fantasy narrative features a young chimney sweep named Tom who,

after falling into a river, is transformed by the fairies into an amphibious creature known as a

water-baby and undergoes a series of underwater adventures that lead him to both higher

physical and moral enlightenment. Throughout his novel, Kingsley undercuts blind acceptance of

modern-day scientific authority figures by satirizing, for instance, the overdramatized animosity

between Thomas Henry Huxley and Richard Owen, two renowned biologists who had

spearheaded the evolutionary debate concerning humans' biological differentiation from apes.[14]

"You may think that there are other more important differences between you and an ape,"

Kingsley's narrator humorously explains at one point, "such as being able to speak, and make

machines, and know right from wrong, and say your prayers, and other little matters of that kind;

but that is a child's fancy, my dear…If you have a hippopotamus major in your brain, you are no

ape."[15] To Victorian readers who followed the famous Huxley-Owen debate that occurred at

Oxford in 1860—including Carroll, who was himself a member of Christ Church, Oxford—

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[13] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[14] Charles Kingsley, *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby* (Boston: T.O.H.P. Burnham, 1864), 139.

[15] Kingsley, *Water-Babies*, 140.

Kingsley's joke about the controversy surrounding the *hippocampus minor* would have been quite clear. In spite of these satires against scientific authority, however, Tom's narrative of maturation—which, as Jessica Straley observes, is closely aligned with recapitulation theory and emulates the evolutionary progression from animal to human form—reveals Kingsley's keen interest in reinforcing the familiar connection between the upward development of the species and that of the child.[16] At the end of the novel, Tom and his friend Ellie exclaim in astonishment at the sight of one another's unexpected growth and transformed appearances: "And no wonder; they were both quite grown up—he into a tall man, and she into a beautiful woman."[17] Far from engaging with the models of evolution proposed by Darwin in *Origin of Species*, this final portrayal of Tom's growth from dirty urchin to mature man resonates strongly with a redemptive model of recapitulative development, in which the child's maturation follows a linear and strictly upward progression. With its penchant for such teleology, however, *The Water-Babies* also presents a much different vision of childhood identity and development than Carroll's first *Alice* story would offer two years later.

In *Alice in Wonderland*, Carroll pushes the figure of the child well beyond its familiar scientific use as a model for either evolutionary theory or recapitulation. Instead, he creates Wonderland, an imaginative space that underscores the limitations of purely progressive understandings of childhood maturation—a space, moreover, in which the child's development is both unbounded and aleatoric. The most literal manifestation of this concept occurs through Alice's various changes in size. Whether she consumes food and drink or does nothing at all, the young girl experiences nearly constant physical growth and shrinkage in a variety of spaces that

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[16] See Jessica Straley, "Of Beasts and Boys: Kingsley, Spencer, and the Theory of Recapitulation," *Victorian Studies* 49, no. 4 (2007): 583-609.

[17] Kingsley, *Water-Babies*, 305.

emphasize Carroll's treatment of her non-teleological development. Early in the novel, for example, Alice—who has shrunk to three inches in height—encounters the Caterpillar, a surly creature that boasts fixed stage-based attitudes about size and change. Upon meeting him, she complains that "being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing" and compares the experience of constant change to the Caterpillar's imminent metamorphosis: "When you have to turn into a chrysalis—you will some day, you know—and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, wo'n't you?" she asks.[18] The Caterpillar, who will eventually undergo several clearly delineated phases of development toward its butterfly stage, answers decidedly in the negative. His self-assurance about his identity reveals the key difference between himself and the young protagonist: unlike Alice, his development as a metamorphic animal *is* seemingly stadial and biologically quantifiable, whereas growth for Alice constitutes a much more erratic occurrence. Her attempt to identify with the Caterpillar's future growth—"I think you'll find it a little queer, wo'n't you?"—proves unsuccessful in large part because whereas Alice's changes in size in Wonderland are bidirectional and non-normative, the butterfly life cycle is linear and always moves toward maturation.

By actively resisting the Caterpillar's imposed conception of linear growth, Alice paradoxically confirms the chaotic nature of not only her own development but also her nonlinear relationship to her environment. Tazudeen emphasizes this idea in his examination of Darwinian thought and the *Alice* stories: Carroll's "stripping of identity, of time, place, and world from the subject," he explains, "speaks to the revolutionized contours of the post-Darwinian world, the end of formal consistency, teleological progress, and the transcendent,

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[18] Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll, Illustrated by John Tenniel*, ed. Martin Gardner (New York: Bramhall, 1960), 68.

divinely ordained separation between things."[19] And in fact Alice's physical mutability depends

almost entirely on the setting that she inhabits at any given moment: her surroundings can both

dangerously restrict her growth (as when she is nearly crushed by her sudden expansion inside

the White Rabbit's house) and broaden the possibilities for growth indefinitely (as when she eats

a piece of mushroom and grows so tall that she can no longer see her hands below the waving

treetops). In other words, space in Carroll's novel determines the limits and nature of Alice's

physical changes, making environment as critical a component in her identity formation as her

actual changes in size. As Beer observes in *Darwin's Plots*: "We tend to think of the individual

organism as dynamic and the environment as static—but the environment, being composed of so

many more varied needs than the individual, is prone to unforeseeable and uncontrollable

changes."[20]

But Darwinian interpretations such as these are also bounded frequently by their limited

sense of scale in Carroll's novel, which seeks to break the boundaries of the narrow discourse

that characterized existing debates surrounding development and growth for the individual.

Murphy, for instance, goes perhaps too far when she labels Wonderland as Carroll's ruthless

literary rendering of "Darwinian nature."[21] According to Murphy, environment is an important

force in Carroll's novel because it affords Alice the opportunity to learn how to leverage her

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[19] Rasheed Tazudeen, "Immanent Metaphor, Branching Form(s), and the Unmaking of the Human in *Alice* and *The Origin of Species*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 43 (2015): 534.

[20] Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, 18.

[21] Murphy, "Darwin and 1860s Children's Literature," 15. "Alice," Murphy continues in her explanation of how Darwinian thought coincides with Carroll's narrative, "receives a first-hand lesson in the 'survival of the fittest' as she is forced to adapt her behaviour to her place within the predator/prey physical hierarchy; once she gains the ability to regulate her size herself she uses her newfound understanding of size and power relations to control her encounters with the Wonderland creatures" (15).

physical transformations and ultimately exert her size-based dominance over the unrelenting

characters that she encounters. Yet it must be stressed that Murphy's interpretation of Alice's

control is more Lamarckian than Darwinian, while her understanding of survival seems to

conflate several distinct threads of Victorian evolutionary thought. Although, as Tazudeen notes,

Wonderland certainly relies on a Darwinian conception of non-teleological temporality and

embodiment, Carroll's landscape does not simply allow Alice to reclaim self-identity at the

expense of her environment. Rather, what Carroll privileges most throughout her adventures is

her ability to engage both dynamically and productively with her inchoate surroundings, rather

than to benefit at their expense.

To return to the earlier scene, for instance: the Caterpillar eventually rewards Alice by

directing her toward two sides of a mushroom, one side of which will make her grow taller and

the other side of which will make her grow shorter. Although at first she must experiment (to

semi-terrifying results) with changing her size, she eventually succeeds in "bringing herself

down to her usual height."[22] No sooner does she achieve her normal size, however (and with it, a

sense of comfort at having regained her original size-based identity), than she determines to alter

it once more. In the same paragraph, she encounters a tiny, four-foot-high house and eats from

one mushroom piece in order to bring herself to nine inches high, since according to Alice:

"Whoever lives there, it'll never do to come upon them *this* size."[23] In this scene, she discovers

that the ability to change sizes at will enables her to navigate more effectively the unfamiliar

situations and environments that she encounters, even if this means deviating from a

conventional pattern of growth. Analogous moments throughout her adventures reinforce this

[22] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 77.

[23] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 77-78.

model of positive, flexible responsivity: whenever Alice grows or shrinks of her own volition, she does not do so merely to intimidate the Wonderland creatures or assert her authority, although U.C. Knoepflmacher and Murphy have suggested as much in their studies of Carroll.[24] Rather, she uses her changes in size to fit into a variety of spaces and accommodate the Wonderland creatures' needs. When she arrives at the March Hare's residence, for example, she nibbles a bit of the mushroom in her hand until she is two feet high before walking toward the house "rather timidly, saying to herself 'Suppose it should be raving mad after all!'"[25] As chaotic as Wonderland may initially appear, Alice's physical transformations force her to become increasingly empathetic about her size and the potential impact that her changes may be exerting on her surroundings. Far from being a narrative of aggression in which Alice learns to dominate her environment through changes in size, Carroll's novel imagines the ways in which a child's sense of self constantly adapts depending on the spaces that she occupies, as well as the creatures that she comes across.

Microscopic, Macroscopic:

Rescaled Perspectives in Natural History, Taxonomy, and the Child as Individual

In this sense, Wonderland embodies a landscape that is not so much Darwinian as it is fraught with the influences of Victorian natural history. With its emphasis on understanding the world through a combination of microscopic scrutiny and macroscopic perspective, this field of study became a national obsession in the early nineteenth century and offered even the amateur

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[24] See U.C. Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[25] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 91.

scientist a new opportunity to reconnect with her natural surroundings through direct, close, and extended observation such as Alice's. The breadth of such studies, as Lynn L. Merrill has asserted, was particularly powerful because "by virtue of its all-inclusiveness, natural history embraced entire landscapes in addition to objects—the totality of impression, the long view—of landforms, weather, vegetation, color and light. The aesthetic of natural history was thus dialectical, moving from particulars to panorama and back again."[26] In *Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* (1789), for example, naturalist Gilbert White delineates his close encounters with specific animals such as the "male *Garrulous Bohemicus*, or German silk-tail," which he identifies by "the five peculiar crimson tags or points which it carries at the end of five of the short remiges."[27] At other times, he paints a vast, lofty picture of the area surrounding his family home in Selborne, as he does in his "Invitation to Selborne":

> See, Selborne spreads her boldest beauties round
>
> The varied valley, and the mountain ground,
>
> Wildly majestic ! What is all the pride,
>
> Of flats, with loads of ornaments supplied ?—
>
> Unpleasing, tasteless, impotent expense,
>
> Compared with Nature's rude magnificence.[28]

Similarly, Philip Gosse's *Romance of Natural History* (1860-61) examines both the detailed anatomy of the brine shrimp ("nearly half an inch in length, and…furnished with eleven pairs of

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[26] Lynn L. Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 15.

[27] Gilbert White, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1880), 36.

[28] White, *Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne*, 463.

leaf-shaped limbs") and the rich Brazilian forest, "where the wiry-haired sloth hangs from the branches, the toothless ant-eater breaks up with its hoofs the great earthy nests of the termites, and the armadillo burrows in the soil; where the capybara and the tapir rush to the water..."[29] In these and similar written accounts of natural history, minute observation and expanded vision combine to create an imaginative, sensory experience of the natural world.

Resonances of this fascination with rescaling constantly one's perspective on the world appear throughout *Alice in Wonderland,* from the figure of the Dodo (a stuttering play on the first syllable of Carroll's family name, Dodgson, but also a reference to a well-known extinct species) to the quick succession of sea animals that the Mock Turtle lists in his doleful song, "The Lobster-Quadrille." Alice's ability to occupy alternately positions of bigness and smallness suggests that she is a naturalist of sorts within this tradition, at least nominally: frequently, her smallness allows her to perceive firsthand previously inaccessible natural phenomena, and moreover to experience them in ways that would otherwise have only been available to scientists using a magnifying glass or microscope. Nineteenth-century natural historians in particular were fascinated with reappropriating the microscope as a means to cultivate an imaginative observation of the world, rather than to evaluate the world through a strictly empirical lens. On the other hand, as Gaston Bachelard observes in *The Poetics of Space* (1958), the empiricist merely exercises "a discipline of objectivity that precludes all daydreams of the imagination" and uses a tool such as the microscope to confirm scientific patterns and phenomena.[30] The naturalist with the magnifying glass, on the other hand, "bars the every-day world. He is a fresh eye before

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[29] Philip Gosse, *The Romance of Natural History* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1861), 74, 59.

[30] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 156.

a new object. The botanist's magnifying glass is youth recaptured. It gives him back the enlarging gaze of a child."[31] By allowing his at-times miniature protagonist to navigate a rich miniaturized world such as Wonderland, Carroll aligns Alice with the nineteenth-century naturalist tradition, in which one's vantage point and relationship to nature is recalibrated constantly. In doing so, he also allows her to experience nature at its organic scale, as well as in its own highly imaginative environment.

Yet Alice is by no means a traditional naturalist, for her size often limits her perspective as well. In the scene preceding her visit to the March Hare's residence, Alice's ingestion of a mushroom piece causes her to shoot upward through the treetops: "All she could see, when she looked down, was an immense length of neck, which seemed to rise like a stalk out of a sea of green leaves that lay far below her. 'Where *have* my shoulders got to? And oh, my poor hands, how is it I can't see you?'"[32] Alice's size, rather than empowering her, disconnects her from both her sense of self and her surroundings. The simultaneous loss of self-identity and environmental connection is augmented by the sudden appearance of a mother Pigeon, who insists on calling the young protagonist a "serpent" and accuses Alice of being an egg thief. Rose Lovell-Smith suggests a crucial link between the Pigeon's attempt to classify Alice and Carroll's longstanding interest in natural history. She illustrates how Alice's inauguration into Wonderland precipitates a reversal in typical natural history relations: rather than being observed by a human child such as Alice, the creatures "dislodge her as human 'reader' of natural phenomena," causing her to experience "what it is like to shift from subject to object, to realize that the observed are now acting as her observers, and that the identified or named ones now claim the status of *her*

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[31] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 155.

[32] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 74.

identifiers or namers."[33] For Lovell-Smith, this inversion creates a moment of intense dissonance in Alice's self-recognition as a human, since Alice can no longer maintain a clear distinction between herself and the natural world that she observes. As a consequence, Alice finds it increasingly difficult to refute the types of classifications that characters such as the Pigeon impose upon her. For instance, the latter's repeated, scathing outbursts throughout this scene— "Serpent! Serpent!"— at last elicit a hesitant reply from the young protagonist: "'But I'm *not* a serpent, I tell you!' said Alice. 'I'm a—I'm a—I'm a little girl,' she added rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through that day."[34] The initial, almost automatic indignation of Alice's retort preempts a much more skeptical moment of self-evaluation, in which the young protagonist is forced to recognize that the label of "little girl" is perhaps as arbitrary as the Pigeon's classification of her as a serpent.

Alice's resistance to being incorrectly named in this scene, however, is not simply a matter of defending her human status from the generalizing discourse of natural history, contrary to Lovell-Smith's suggestion. Instead, this resistance marks a critical moment when Alice—in spite of her confusion—finds it necessary to assert her right to determine her identity and sense of self-worth without deferring to external systems of classification, either scientific or social. At one point, the Pigeon points out that Alice is "looking for eggs, I know *that* well enough…and what does it matter to me whether you're a little girl or a serpent?" Alice's reply is immediate: "It matters a good deal to *me*."[35] By countering her aggressor's "I" and "me" with her own emphatic "*me*," the young protagonist makes a concerted effort to reclaim her individual subjectivity,

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[33] Rose Lovell-Smith, "Eggs and Serpents: Natural History References in Lewis Carroll's Scene of Alice and the Pigeon," *Children's Literature* 35 (2007): 39.

[34] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 76.

[35] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 77.

privileging self-evaluation ("it matters a good deal to *me*") over an external observer's

disinterestedness ("what does it matter to me[?]") in an effort to maintain her own identity. In the

next moment, she therefore rejoins with renewed confidence: "I'm not looking for eggs, as it

happens, and if I was, I shouldn't want *yours*—I don't like them raw." The blunt repetition of "I"

statements in Alice's retort emphasizes her insistence on being seen as an individual with unique

preferences, and not a mere representative of all "little girls" that (at least according to the

Pigeon) might prefer their eggs raw. In destabilizing faulty systems of classification such as the

Pigeon's, Alice's unsettling growth offers a moment of newfound clarity that enables her to

assert her identity as an individual rather than a species.

Carroll's concern with maintaining this level of distinctiveness in his protagonist

resonates strongly with broader, ongoing scientific inquiries into the nature of the individual

organism as well. In *Principles of Biology* (1864-67), for instance, anthropologist and biologist

Herbert Spencer proposed that the concept of "the individual" could best be defined as a unit that

had achieved equilibrium between its internal and external relations:

> What is the individual? …The distinction between individual in its biological
>
> sense, and individual in its more general sense, must consist in the manifestation of Life,
>
> properly so called. Life we have seen to be, "the definite combination of heterogeneous
>
> changes, both simultaneous and successive, in correspondence with external co-
>
> existences and sequences." Hence, a biological individual is any concrete whole having a
>
> structure which enables it, when placed in appropriate conditions, to continuously adjust
>
> its internal relations to external relations, so as to maintain the equilibrium of its
>
> functions.[36]

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[36] Spencer, "Principles of Biology," 286-89.

For Spencer (who quotes an earlier version of his own paper in the above excerpt), as for Carroll, the individual is characterized by its ability to engage dynamically with its environment, and in particular to change when confronted by external forces. Yet the two writers' conceptions of the individual differ critically: whereas Carroll's protagonist repeatedly asserts her right to be what Spencer calls an "individual in its more general sense" (that is, a human individual with her own subjectivity), Spencer and other evolutionary theorists dismiss anthropocentric approaches to understanding the individual as irrelevant. As Laura Otis observes, the latter group maintained instead that "people's understanding of selfhood made no sense on an evolutionary scale…the human concept of individuality had no basis in nature. It was rooted in culture and was being imposed on nature by writers who failed to see humanity from a broader, evolutionary perspective."[37] By creating a narrative of natural history that shifts constantly based on his protagonist's non-normative changes, Carroll resists the idea that individual identity can be reduced to such unfeeling scientific categorization, even in a natural space as desperately in need of ordering as Wonderland.

Even so, other systems of classification and naming inevitably find their way into Wonderland, and Alice—who cannot altogether escape them—must frequently learn to reappropriate them to her own advantage. After her fall down the rabbit hole, Alice (who has drunk from a bottle and grown more than nine feet high) begins "thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself" and wonders aloud if she could have been changed for any of them: "'I'm sure I'm not Ada,' she said, 'for her hair goes in such long ringlets, and mine doesn't go in ringlets at all; and I'm sure I can't be Mabel, for I know all sorts

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[37] Laura Otis, "Evolution," in *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Otis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 237.

of things, and she, oh! she knows such a very little!'"[38] Confronted by this initial crisis in

identity, Alice immediately employs a category—children, and specifically those of her own

age—in order to orient herself. As she reflects on her physical and cognitive difference from the

other girls, however, she must also acknowledge that such a systematic approach to determining

one's identity is inadequate: despite their shared nominal status as little girls, the ringlets that

Ada possesses, as well as the lack of knowledge that Mabel exhibits, together allow Alice to

conclude that her identity is not merely interchangeable with theirs. In a moment of exasperated

but keen self-recognition, she finally exclaims: "Besides, *she's* she, and *I'm* I, and—oh dear,

how puzzling it all is!" Here, Alice supplants her previous, age-based system of classification

with a much more relative linguistic one, in which the use of the third-person "she" separates

Mabel from Alice, the first-person subject "I." Although she ultimately remains unconvinced that

she is not Mabel, her differential use of pronouns allows her to reaffirm briefly that she is, in

fact, a unique first-person speaker in her own narrative.

Carroll's recurring interest in the tense relationship among these three seemingly

disparate topics—his child protagonist, broader accounts of natural historical classification, and

the powerful identity-forming potential of language—is not as arbitrary as it might initially

appear. Alice's repeated attempts to invoke language as a defense against the Wonderland

creatures' misclassifications, in many ways, is fraught with the discourse of ongoing mid

nineteenth-century debates concerning the origins of natural history and the child. For instance,

Chambers' *Vestiges*, which analogized the child's development with the evolution of humankind,

also regarded language as a key indicator of the specie's evolutionary—rather than divinely

inspired—origins. According to this highly influential study, "there was language upon earth

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[38] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 37.

long ere the history of our race commenced. The only additional fact in the history of language, which was produced by our creation, was the rise of a new mode of expression—namely, that by sound—signs produced by the vocal organs."[39] Given his view of the linear development from the "inferior animals" to humans, it is unsurprising that Chambers thus regarded language itself to be "amongst the things least difficult to be acquired, if we can form any judgment from what we see in children, most of whom have, by three years of age, while their information and judgment are still as nothing, mastered and familiarized themselves with a quantity of words, infinitely exceeding in proportion what they acquire in the course of any subsequent similar portion of time."[40] By closely aligning human children's linguistic capabilities with those of the "inferior animals," Chambers again reinforces the common parallel between individual (childhood) development and an evolutionary theory of humanity.

It is this precise parallel, however, that Alice defies as she engages in one linguistic battle after another with the creatures of Wonderland in order to assert her individual subjectivity as a complex human child. After all, Carroll's fictional world is one of extreme linguistic mutability, and Alice's proven ability to engage imaginatively in language games best illustrates Carroll's belief that his child protagonist does not merely create "signs produced by the vocal organs" without understanding their meaning. On the contrary: even when she misinterprets certain linguistic situations, Alice generates new (and arguably even more interesting) narratives by treating language as an element that can easily transcend its aural origins. The clearest example of this dynamic approach to language use occurs in the Mouse's tale/tail, an episode in which form and punning famously collide. The Mouse, whom Alice observes to be "a person of

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[39] Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, 311.

[40] Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, 314.

authority among them," offers to tell her his history, sighing that "mine is a long and a sad

tale"—to which Alice confusedly replies (having mistaken the word "tale" for its homophone

"tail"): "It *is* a long tail, certainly…but why do you call it sad?"[41] As a result of this ostensible

misinterpretation, she imagines the Mouse's story in a singularly unexpected way: as a concrete

poem written in tail rhyme, where the words wind down the page in truncated lines that diminish

in size as they reach the poem's end. While the Mouse takes offense at the young protagonist's

unconventional interpretation ("you insult me by talking such nonsense!" it exclaims angrily), it

is Alice's flexible approach to language that makes an otherwise inscrutable nonsense poem such

a visual delight. Moreover, by transforming the Mouse's ambiguous speech into such an

innovative written form, Alice undermines the potentially violent or animal-like associations of

oral language, which (as Jean-Jacques Lecercle suggests) is "always threatening to revert to

screams, because they carry the violent affects of the speaker's body."[42] If a child protagonist

such as Alice is frequently baffled or even embarrassed by her encounters with the sharp-tongued

wordplay of Wonderland creatures, it is certainly not for a lack of consciousness about the

language that she so imaginatively reappropriates.

Yet Alice's relationship to language, much like her relationship to her changing natural

environment, remains an inherently unstable one. As scholars such as Beatrice Turner and

Patricia Meyer Spacks have suggested, Alice never develops a clear sense of how to control the

excesses of language that occur throughout Wonderland, indicating that her linguistic

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[41] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 51.

[42] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy through the Looking Glass* (La Salle: Open Court, 1985), 105.

development is as unpredictable and nonlinear as her startling physical transformations.[43] Even

after having been exposed to multiple types of linguistic play during her adventures, for example,

Alice still fails to understand why the Mock Turtle exchanges the word "porpoise" for

"purpose," or the humor in the fact that lessons under the sea are called lessons because they

"lessen from day to day." [44] Much like her confusion concerning the Caterpillar's strictly

teleological understanding of physical development, Alice's difficulties here arise in part because

the linguistic environment of Wonderland exists in a state of constant flux. Richard Chenevix

Trench—theological chair at King's College, London as well as a member of the Philological

Society—published influentially and widely on the history of the English language's evolution,

as well as on the history of the church. In 1851, Trench expressed the view that while language

historically improved as human civilizations became more sophisticated in their thoughts and

lifestyle, the dangerous possibility remained that "with every impoverishment and debasing of

personal and national life there goes hand in hand a corresponding impoverishment and

debasement of language."[45] He observed that language did not operate according to strictly

progressive laws, but rather existed in a state of perpetual incertitude: "It is impossible," he

concludes at one point in *On the Study of Words*, "to inscribe an immutable statute of language

on the periphery of a vortex, whirling as it advances."[46] Here, Trench propounds the critical

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[43] See Beatrice Turner, "'Which is to be master?': Language as Power in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2010): 243-54, and Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Logic and Language in *Through the Looking-Glass*," *ETC* 18, no. 1 (1961): 269-75.

[44] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 137, 130.

[45] Richard Chenevix Trench, *On the Study of Words* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1853), 20.

[46] Trench, *On the Study of Words*, 218.

belief—one that Carroll expresses repeatedly throughout his *Alice* stories—that chaotic or

nonsensical language patterns expose the fundamentally nonlinear nature of anthropological

development. Hans Aarsleff aptly summarizes Trench's ideas by observing: "If things [regarding

language] at least might have been more perfect in the beginning than they later became, then the

belief in progressive development, or growth, would have to be abandoned for a concept of

change."[47] For Carroll as for Trench, then, linguistic sophistication is not the endpoint of human

development, but rather a tenuous and always mutable characteristic of the developmental

process.

Alice, Unclassified

Given this framework, only one form of language seems to remain stable throughout

Wonderland: the proper name "Alice," which at once evokes Alice's individual subjectivity and

linguistically distances her from genealogical time. Alice has no surname, only a given name; the

sole family member to appear in the narrative is her sister, who occupies the same generation as

Alice and therefore does not threaten to position Alice within a generational timeline. In one of

her encounters with the White Rabbit, Alice achieves both linguistic and individual clarity by

recognizing her status as an individual with a unique proper name. Upon running into Alice in

front of his house, the White Rabbit angrily exclaims: "Why, Mary Ann, what *are* you doing out

here? Run home this moment, and fetch me a pair of gloves and a fan!" Alice runs off in surprise

and fright, but her thoughts on his misidentification are nevertheless clear: "He took me for his

housemaid," she muses as she scampers off to retrieve his things. "How surprised he'll be when

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[47] Trench, *On the Study of Words*, 237.

he finds out who I am!"[48] Here, Alice can easily distinguish between the housemaid and herself because—unlike broad appellations such as "little girl" or even biologically vague ones such as "serpent"—the name Mary Ann is a precise referent: either it refers to Alice or it does not. For Carroll, the purpose of naming here is not taxonomic in nature, as it is for many of the Wonderland creatures, but rather an assertion of Alice's human singularity.

The narrative further stresses this sense of singularity in the following moment, when Alice imagines what it would be like to live in a world in which animals regularly order their human counterparts about. "'How queer it seems,' Alice said to herself, 'to be going messages for a rabbit! I suppose [the cat] Dinah'll be sending me on messages next!...'Miss Alice! Come here directly, and get ready for your walk!'"[49] While the protagonist imaginatively contemplates a world of inverted human-animal relations, her individual subjectivity here remains safe so long as she maintains a strong sense of her own name. Even in a fanciful scenario such as this one, Dinah will call for "Miss Alice," the remembrance of which reassures Alice and gives her the confidence to conclude: "'Only I don't think…that they'd let Dinah stop in the house if it began ordering people about like that!'" In this critical moment of self-reflection, Alice's proper name enables her to assert both her individual and distinctly human identity: once she realizes that she is a singular Miss Alice, she also recognizes by extension that she cannot be simply exchanged for an animal such as Dinah, just as she could not previously be changed for little girls such as Mabel or Ada. Scenes such as this one suggest that for Carroll, linguistically generated subjectivity serves as yet another essential link between the constantly transforming human child's sense of self and the social or natural environment that she inhabits

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[48] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 56.

[49] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 56.

at any given moment. Assigning proper names, after all, is a social rather than a natural process, a fact that is reinforced by the White Rabbit's house, which offers the novel's perhaps most traditionally domestic space with its "tidy little room" and isolation from the chaotic natural world outside its cozy walls.

The powerful potential of proper naming reaches its climax in yet another enclosed, manmade space: the Queen's courtroom, in which the White Rabbit calls Alice to stand as a witness in the Knave of Heart's trial. Before the trial begins, Alice peers into the jury box and is informed by the Gryphon that the jurors are all busy "putting down their names…for fear they should forget them before the end of the trial." "Stupid things!" Alice cries indignantly, implying that at the very least, a proper name cannot be confused or forgotten. The following moment confirms this idea: "Imagine her surprise," the narrator observes, "when the White Rabbit read out, at the top of his shrill little voice 'Alice!'" Structurally, the unexpected use of Alice's proper name by a Wonderland character—one that, moreover, has never given any indication of knowing her name—allows her to re-anchor her sense of self. As soon as her name is called, the chapter ends, and the next begins as Alice jumps up from her seat, crying without hesitation: "Here!"[50] This act of self-identification is paired with a significant physiological occurrence: slowly but surely, Alice has been growing in size within the courtroom, though she does not seem concerned (as she previously did in the White Rabbit's house) that she will grow too large to fit the space that she occupies. Rather, in this penultimate scene the narrative presents a very different type of growth than Alice has heretofore experienced: her expansion is gradual, and not simply—as Nina Auerbach asserts—a "sudden growth [that] gives [Alice] the power to break out

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[50] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 153.

of a dream that has become too dangerous."[51] Instead, this is the only moment in the novel that

protracts the process of the child protagonist's change long enough to transform it into an

observable, potentially empirical phenomenon. Yet the single instance in which Alice's

courtroom growth receives any attention—the King feebly declares, "*all persons more than a*

mile high to leave the court"—represents a clearly inaccurate attempt at classification and

prompts Alice's much more determined retort: "*I'm* not a mile high."[52] Assured of both her

linguistic and physical identity, Alice finally turns the novel's central tension concerning

classification and naming on its head by declaring the creatures for what they are: "Who cares

for you?" she exclaims defiantly. "You're nothing but a pack of cards!"[53]

This well-known moment jolts Alice out of her dream and back into the real world, where

her sister recalls her with a gentle command: "Wake up, Alice dear!" Alice's proper name

bridges her adventures in Wonderland with her modern-day reality, which has morphed into a

hybrid natural landscape of sorts:

So [Alice's sister] sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in

Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change to

dull reality—the grass would be only rustling in the wind, and the pool rippling to the

waving of the reeds—the rattling teacups would change to tinkling sheep-bells, and the

Queen's shrill cries to the voice of the shepherd-boy—and the sneeze of the baby, the

shriek of the Gryphon, and all the other queer noises, would change (she knew) to the

confused clamour of the busy farm-yard—while the lowing of the cattle in the distance

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[51] Auerbach, "Alice and Wonderland," 35.

[52] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 156.

[53] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 161.

would take the place of the Mock Turtle's heavy sobs.[54] The ethereal, suspended quality of the natural landscape lends this final scene a mythic air that seems, in some ways, even dreamier than its make-believe counterpart. Unlike the brusque, classificatory representation of nature in Wonderland, the images and sounds that Alice's sister half-imagines—the grass, the lowing of the cattle, the rippling pool—are carefully cultivated and well maintained, a far cry from the overgrown forests and shrubbery that Alice had previously navigated in her dream world. That Carroll chooses to end his novel in this fluid, half-fantastic space is unsurprising; for, as Laurence Talairach-Vielmas observes of the close relationship between Victorian natural history and fairy tales: "Although the wonders of science could account for the mysteries of nature, nature nonetheless remained a fairyland" for fantasy writers such as Carroll.[55] In the richly mutable space that connects Wonderland with the real observable world, taxonomic designations suddenly fade away to produce a fairy-like landscape that teems with a much more amenable version of natural history in the making.

This liminal space produces liberating new possibilities for Alice as well: at last, it allows her to negotiate a different type of natural and generational history, one that is empathetic, imaginative, and uniquely feminine. Throughout her adventures, after all, Wonderland's harsh natural landscape forces the young protagonist to reconsider what it means to be an individual little girl, especially as she encounters scathing female characters such as the Queen of Hearts and the Duchess. By the end of the novel, however, Alice's sister alternatively contemplates what it might mean for Alice to become a grown woman who will one day pass on these stories to other children. The former imagines a romantic narrative in which Alice "would, in the after-

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[54] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 163-64.

[55] Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Fairy Tales, Natural History and Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 20.

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time, be herself a grown woman [who] would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and

loving heart of her childhood; and how she would gather about her other little children, and make

their eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale."[56] Paradoxically, by constantly reliving her

experiences with the Wonderland characters and passing her story on to children after she is

already grown, Alice can continue to explore the murky space that connects childhood with

adulthood—as well as girlhood and womanhood—without being tied down to either: she will

"feel with all [the children's] simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys,

remember her own child-life, and the happy summer days."[57] In this final moment, linear

genealogical time fuses into a much more fluid, compassionate narrative space: Alice's

experiences and memories as a little girl will allow her to transcend purely age-based notions of

development, so long as stories both by and about Alice are told. If one type of generational

history is sustainable in Carroll's novel, it is therefore far from hierarchical, patriarchal, or

detachedly scientific in nature. Instead, it is produced through the very imaginative, enduring

type of storytelling in which Alice participates: timeless tales that capture a little girl's wonder of

the natural world without erasing the voice—or the individuality—of the storyteller.

2. "A Great Huge Game of Chess that's Being Played—All Over the World":

Linguistic Play and Global Games in *Through the Looking-Glass*

If *Alice in Wonderland* concludes with an homage to the importance of imaginative

storytelling, the novel's sequel—*Through the Looking-Glass*—begins with a nod to what, for

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[56] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 164.

[57] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 164.

Carroll, was an equally critical facet of the imagination: the powerful potential of play. Given the rapidly expanding industry in children's toys throughout the nineteenth century, as well as Carroll's own fascination with play in its various manifestations, it is unsurprising that his young protagonist also professes such a strong predilection for self-amusement. As the narrator of *Through the Looking-Glass* informs us early on, playing make-believe is one of Alice's most treasured pastimes: her favorite saying, "Let's pretend…" opens up endless opportunities for roleplaying throughout the novel and enables her to believe all sorts of impossibilities, such as the existence of unicorns and the idea that one can simultaneously become several different members of royalty if one believes hard enough.[58] More important, however, Alice's penchant for playing prepares her to participate in the game-like structure of the Looking-Glass world, which—as the protagonist soon discovers—is filled with animated, larger-than-life chess pieces that inhabit a sprawling and dynamic land unlike anything she has seen before: namely, a giant chessboard.

In many ways, Alice's desire to leave her own world behind and explore the new, chess-inspired landscape on the other side of the looking-glass emphasizes what Carroll saw as the crucial connection between play and games for children. The young girl's narrative, which quickly becomes a quest to be crowned queen, is after all made possible only through a bit of make-believe on Alice's part. "It's very like our passage as far as you can see, only you know it may be quite different on beyond," she exclaims in the opening scene of the novel as she sits in her living room and peers at the looking-glass. She adds wistfully to the black kitten in her lap: "I'm sure it's got, oh! such beautiful things in it! Let's pretend there's a way of getting through

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[58] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 180.

into it, somehow, Kitty."[59] This willingness to suspend disbelief serves as an amusing pastime for the young child, who in the same scene pretends to play chess with the kitten and even makes believe that it has become part of the game she is playing ("Let's pretend that you're the Red Queen, Kitty!" she cries to the hapless feline). Perhaps more centrally, however, this dual play-game framework allows Carroll to examine how the fantasy elements of both play and games might enable his young protagonist to learn most productively about the vast, global world that exists well beyond the one that she currently inhabits.

In what follows, I suggest that Alice's ability to play make-believe and participate in the various structured games that she encounters in the Looking-Glass land together complicate what appears to be her linear trajectory from pawn to queen in Carroll's narrative. In particular, Alice's desire to become a queen does not merely serve as a "crushing verdict" on domesticity (or, particularly, the ineffectual rule practiced by Queen Victoria), as Laura Mooneyham White proposes in her study of queenhood in Carroll's novel.[60] Rather, the young girl's quest to become a queen underscores Carroll's belief that even the most linear and seemingly ethnocentric pursuits are inseparable from the broader global histories in which they are embedded. By first focusing on Alice's interactions with various shifting game and linguistic structures in the Looking-Glass world, and then examining the subtler moments of historical and cultural richness that characterize many of these interactions, my analysis offers a more globally minded reading of Carroll's second *Alice* novel than scholarship has previously allowed. In particular, my focus expands upon the critical commonplace (which, however, has been convincingly framed by

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[59] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 181.

[60] Laura Mooneyham White, "Domestic Queen, Queenly Domestic: Queenly Contradictions in Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2007): 113.

influential scholars such as Lecercle and Wim Tigges) that Alice's adventures are generally

chaotic and nonsensical because Carroll wishes to expose humorously the arbitrariness of

semantic and logic systems. Although this impulse certainly drives much of the novel's

commentary on language and logic, the author makes it clear that Alice's ability to pretend and

play games can also help foster a deeper understanding of one's interconnectedness to an

increasingly global world.[61] All too often, this body of literary criticism has focused on how

rules and games operate within either Carroll's fantasy world or personal life, while making light

of (or often eliding completely) the ways in which the author deliberately frames these games as

a gateway to much richer global narratives and landscapes.

Specifically, then, I argue that Alice's development as a child—and especially as a young

girl—throughout the narrative is by no means teleological in nature or limited to her fantasy

world. Instead, this development is constantly shaped by global forces and histories to which,

importantly, Alice gains increasing access as she learns to participate in Looking-Glass play and

games. (For Carroll, key examples of these influences included the fashionable revival of Anglo-

Saxon studies and a rising interest in comparative philology, both of which topics were

concerned with the role of ethnocentrism in Victorian culture and became the subject of heated

debates at Oxford throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century.) Alice's imaginative,

eclectic adventures enable Carroll to consider what it might mean for a child to experience both

games and the world on an increasingly global and fantastic scale, one that—like the world

through the looking-glass—is never fixed and, moreover, is always filled with more histories and

meanings than one initially perceives.

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[61] See Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988).

The tone of Carroll's second *Alice* novel, as scholars have observed at length, differs

significantly from that of the first novel, but perhaps most strikingly in its extended

preoccupation with the child's relationship to play and games. In *Play, Games, and Sports: The

Literary Works of Lewis Carroll* (1974), Kathleen Blake indicates that play constitutes a form of

"mastery for its own sake," by which the child learns to assimilate reality to the ego without

compromising the latter.[62] For Blake, whose conceptualization relies heavily on the modern child

development theories of Freud, Erik Erikson, and Jean Piaget, play is defined by its ability to

reconcile the child's internal framework with the external world through make-believe and

symbolic activities. By contrast, games are unique in their ability to create particularized

universes that require neither external reference nor validation. As Sewell similarly points out:

"Each game…is an enclosed whole, with its own rigid laws which cannot be questioned within

the game itself; if you put yourself inside the system which is the game, you bind yourself by

that system's laws, and so incidentally obtain that particular sense of freedom that games have to

offer."[63] Unlike the chaotic landscape that characterizes Wonderland, the world through the

looking-glass quite literally constitutes a game universe based on one of the author's favorite

pastimes: chess. The land, as Carroll's narrator observes, was "a most curious country," with "a

number of tiny little brooks running straight across it from side to side, and the ground

between…divided up into squares by a number of little green hedges, that reached from brook to

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[62] Kathleen Blake, *Play, Games, and Sports: The Literary Works of Lewis Carroll* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 27-28.

[63] Sewell, *Field of Nonsense,* 52.

brook."[64] Alice, who agrees to start her adventures in the first square as a white pawn, quickly discovers that she must traverse this carefully manicured chessboard landscape and reach the eighth square before she can become a queen as she desires.

At first glance, the teleological, self-contained nature of Alice's quest to achieve queenhood seems fitting for such a structured game world. Carroll, who was himself an avid player of games and enjoyed inventing elaborate variations on chess in particular, emphasizes his attention to the rules that allow the Looking-Glass world to operate precisely as a game of chess would. In the 1897 preface to the novel, the author thus defends the immaculate, rule-bound construction of his fantasy game world: "The *alternation* of Red and White is perhaps not so strictly observed as it might be, and the 'castling' of the three Queens is merely a way to saying that they entered the palace: but the 'check' of the White King at move 6, the capture of the Red Knight at move 7, and the final 'checkmate' of the Red King, will be found, by anyone who will take the trouble to set the pieces and play the moves as directed, to be strictly in accordance with the laws of the game."[65] He reinforces the ostensible reality of this chess-based universe by detailing visually the various chess pieces' moves, which are meant to correspond with specific events that occur throughout the narrative:

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[64] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 207.

[65] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 171.
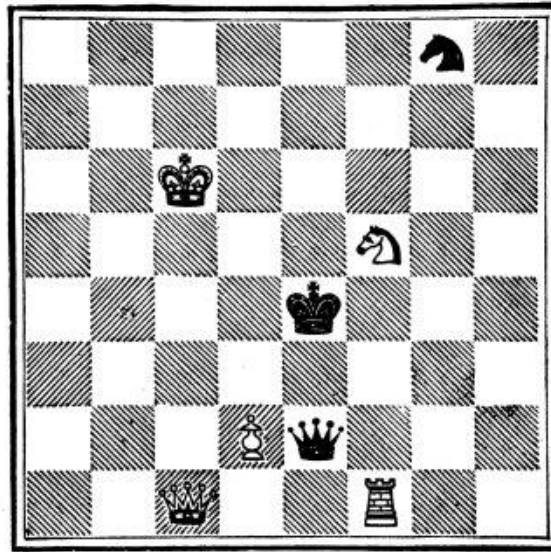
White Pawn (Alice) to play, and win in eleven moves.

	PAGE	
1. Alice meets R. Q.	140	1. R. Q. to K. R.'s 4th ....
2. Alice through Q.'s 3rd *(by railway)*..	147	2. W. Q. to Q. B.'s 4th *(after shawl)* ...
to Q.'s 4th *(Tweedledum*		3. W. Q. to Q. B.'s 5th *(becomes sheep)*
and Tweedledee)	149	4. W. Q. to K. B.'s 8th *(leaves egg on*
3. Alice meets W. Q. *(with shawl)*	168	*shelf)* ....
4. Alice to Q.'s 5th *(shop, river, shop)* .	173	5. W. Q. to Q. B.'s 8th *(flying from R.*
5. Alice to Q.'s 6th *(Humpty Dumpty)* .	179	*Kt.)*..............................
6. Alice to Q.'s 7th *(forest)*	200	6. R. Kt. to K.'s 2nd (ch.) ....
7. W. Kt. takes R. Kt	202	7. W. Kt. to K. B.'s 5th ....
8. Alice to Q.'s 8th *(coronation)*	213	8. R. Q. to K.'s sq. *(examination)* .....
9. Alice becomes Queen.............	220	9. Queens castle ....
10. Alice castles *(feast)*	223	10. W. Q. to Q. R.'s 6th *(soup)* ....
11. Alice takes R.Q. & wins	230	

Figure 1.1. A detailed chart of chess moves on which Carroll's Looking-glass narrative is ostensibly based. [66]

For a mathematician, logician, and meticulous inventor of games such as Carroll, the intricacy of

this coordinated game world allows the author to create a narrative that painstakingly emulates

the rules of chess and therefore regulates the types of moves—namely, linear ones—that a pawn

such as Alice can make throughout the novel. As Blake observes: "Chance is not involved in

chess, as it is in cards, so that Alice's adventures through the Looking-Glass have a more

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[66] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 172.

predetermined cast than those she had in Wonderland."[67]

Yet—as Martin Gardner, John Fisher, and other scholars have been quick to point out—the connection between Carroll's narrative and the established rules of conventional chess is a tenuous one at best, and perhaps purposefully so.[68] Fisher, for instance, highlights two of the "most glaring inconsistencies" to the game: "There is no explanation of why White makes thirteen moves to Red's three, eight of them in succession; nor why the White Queen, in its final move, ignores the check by the Red Queen on the White Queen."[69] Although Fisher offers some of the cursory suggestions (originally made by Ivor Davies in the *Anglo-Welsh Review*) that might explicate these inconsistencies, this critical impulse to rationalize Carroll's narrative according to the rules of a preexisting game such as chess ignores the fundamentally play-based framework in which the narrative is embedded.[70] On the facing page that immediately precedes Carroll's chessboard diagram, for example, the author presents a list of dramatis personae "*as arranged before commencement of game*" that carefully details each of the team's key characters: Tweedledee and the Unicorn play white chess pieces, Daisy and the Messenger play

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[67] Blake, *Play, Games, and Sports*, 136.

[68] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 170.

[69] John Fisher, *The Magic of Lewis Carroll* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1973), 86.

[70] According to Davies, the first inconsistency—the imbalanced number of moves between White and Red—can be explained by the fact that ancient games of chess incorporated elements of chance, in which the number of moves for each team was determined by the casts of the dice. The second inconsistency—the Red Queen's failure to announce a "check"—is in fact "entirely logical because, at the moment of her arrival at King one, she said to Alice…'Speak when you're spoken to!' Since no one had spoken to *her* she would have been breaking her own rule had she said 'check'" ("Looking-Glass Chess," *Anglo-Welsh Review* 15 [Autumn 1970]: 189-91).

red pawns, and so forth.[71] This character list reminds the reader of the performative nature of the Looking-Glass world, which might choose to follow—or at least make a convincing pretense of following—the rules of chess, but can just as easily engage in moments of unstructured, seemingly anarchic play. Carroll—who was exceedingly fond of stage plays—also embraced the malleability of theatrical make-believe, which required actors to pretend to be what they were not and allowed them to bend the social conventions that regulated, for example, the fixity of one's identity. In the first chapter of the novel, the narrator thus explains the powerful rule-bending effect that Alice's love for pretending can produce: "She had had quite a long argument with her sister only the day before—all because Alice had begun with 'Let's pretend we're kings and queens'; and her sister, who liked being very exact, had argued that they couldn't, because there were only two of them, and Alice had been reduced at last to say 'Well *you* can be one of them, then, and *I'll* be all the rest."[72] Much like Carroll's claim that he "strictly observes" the rules of chess, the rule that Alice's sister attempts to impose here is, perhaps, an "exact" one—at least, according to the grammatical conventions that prevent one from assigning multiple personae when there are only two individuals involved. Even so, this rule fails to hold up in the face of Alice's true desire, which is simply to play-act, regardless of what her sister views as a syntactic imprecision. Confronted by her sister's rule-bound grammatical system, the child protagonist is finally exasperated into making language fit into the structure of her play ("*you* can be one of them, then, and *I'll* be all the rest"), rather than the other way around.[73]

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[71] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 135.

[72] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 180.

[73] Alice's penchant for play is of particular historical interest, for it also engages in some of the critical debates that emerged around this period about both the value and dangers of unregulated play during childhood. Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, amid mounting

This early moment sets an important precedent for the type of linguistic play and rules that the Looking-Glass creatures employ time and again in their encounters with Alice. The problematic relationship between words and meanings perhaps most famously emerges in her interaction with Humpty-Dumpty, a presumptuous egg-shaped character that challenges constantly Alice's framework for understanding wordplay. At one point during their conversation, for instance, he declares that the word "glory" means "a nice knock-down argument for you!" which immediately prompts an indignant response from the young protagonist:

> "But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument," Alice objected.
>
> "When *I* use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."
>
> "The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

interest in psychology and pathology, British physicians and psychiatrists such as Henry Holland and Sir James Crichton-Brown published accounts that overwhelmingly associated overactive imaginations and reverie with mental maladies. Carroll, as Stephanie L. Schatz has pointed out, "had a keen interest in medicine and mental health, purchasing scores of medical books that featured diverse topics ranging from phrenology to homoepathy," including titles such as Holland's *Chapters on Mental Physiology* (1852) and Henry Maudsley's *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (1867) ("Lewis Carroll's Dream-Child and Victorian Child Psychopathy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 76, no. 1 [2016]: 94). Although an overwhelming majority of these studies warned that children, like adults, were susceptible to delusional fancies that could lead to madness, Schatz suggests that Carroll's "positive depictions of imagination and fancy in children stand in stark opposition to prevailing medical perceptions of daydreaming children…While psychologists increasingly pathologized dream-states in children as delusional, Carroll links his 'dream-child' with 'wonder,' that is, an expression of creativity, ingenuity, and complexity" (96). In other words, Alice's ability to make believe that she is a pawn-turned-queen in a life-size game of chess positions her—at least for Carroll—as an ideally and liberatingly imaginative child that resisted then-contemporary medical opinion.

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."[74]

Much like Alice's earlier insistence with her sister, Humpty-Dumpty's claim that words can mean many different things reinforces the fundamental idea that meaning is flexible rather than fixed, depending on the speaker's intentions. Whereas Alice only uses language to the extent that she needs it in order to engage in performative play such as making-believe, however, Humpty-Dumpty insists on turning linguistic play into a structured exchange: a language game with its own inscrutable set of rules for making meaning. As Beatrice Turner suggests: "Whatever rules are being adhered to here, they are ones to which Alice is denied access, and as such she almost always comes out second best in the debates in which she is engaged."[75]

And in fact this idea—of coming out second best—is critical to the two characters' exchange. Alice's increasing reluctance to participate in Humpty Dumpty's logic games threatens the games' continuation since, of course, both players must participate in order to keep the game going. Toward the beginning of their conversation, Alice is perhaps mildly amused by Humpty Dumpty's idiosyncratic speeches: for instance, she remarks to herself that Humpty Dumpty "talks about [conversation] just as if it was a game" when the latter suggests that it is his turn to choose a subject.[76] Shortly afterward, however, the protagonist reacts scathingly to his suggestion that she should have "left off at seven" years old; she retorts that "one ca'n't help growing older," to which Humpty Dumpty promptly replies: "*One* ca'n't, perhaps…but *two* can. With proper assistance, you might have left off at seven."[77] This moment has been subjected to a

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[74] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 269.

[75] Turner, "'Which is to be master?'" 247.

[76] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 265.

[77] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 266.

variety of intriguing interpretations, including Gardner's suggestion that "the pun introduces a murderous innuendo, one of the darkest of the book's jokes about death." [78] Perhaps more proximate here, however, is the fact that Humpty Dumpty's reference to twoness problematically positions Alice's growth as part of a broader process of collaborative gameplay. If growing older is a game in which other players may join and participate, then Alice's penchant for play is not the singular, individualized experience that she initially imagines it to be, despite her insistence that she "never [asks] advice about growing."[79] Rather, moments such as this one imply that, at least in Carroll's fantasy land, learning what it means to grow older is fundamentally about learning the rules governing our interactions with other players as well.

As a consequence, here we begin to see an important outward shift—away from the localized level of the individual to the much wider level of intrapersonal networks—in Carroll's representation of the child's developmental experience. Although Alice's earlier make-believe is done for the sake of her own amusement, the games that the author himself enjoyed playing with his child friends were highly social in nature: like Humpty Dumpty, Carroll was very much interested in the appeal of games involving two players rather than one. In *The Game of Logic* (1886), a book that introduces children to logical reasoning, the author aligns himself quite happily with Humpty Dumpty's perspective about the value of incorporating multiple players into what might otherwise be solitary, asocial games. In the preface to this work, Carroll declares: "How much easier it is, when you want to play a Game, to find ONE Player than twenty-two. At the same time, though one Player is enough, a good deal more amusement may

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[78] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 266.

[79] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 266.

be got by two working at it together, and correcting each other's mistakes."[80] Blake helpfully

adds, moreover, that the rules governing games only "exist when more than one are playing, for

they are meaningless except to regulate interchange or competition."[81] For Carroll, then, games

are useful because they introduce a social—and usually socializing (though not always

pleasant)—element to the young participant's life, prompting her to recognize that growing is not

only about oneself or the ego, but one's relationality to larger social networks.[82] At key moments

throughout the narrative, Alice becomes aware of this critical fact and learns to take advantage

of—rather than outright reject—the often inscrutable game rules that define her interactions with

Looking-Glass characters. In response to Humpty Dumpty's increasingly aggressive remarks on

her age, for instance, Alice counters by commenting on his belt/cravat, for "they had had quite

enough of the subject of age, she thought: and, if they really were to take turns in choosing

subjects, it was *her* turn now."[83] Although she remains unable to control or even fully decipher

the rules that dictate Humpty Dumpty's language and logic games, the child protagonist is

nonetheless determined to prove that she, too, can be an active and formidable opponent when

provoked into participating.

    In this scene and others like it, Carroll clearly resists the idea—posited by many of his

contemporaries in science and childhood psychology—that games were not of particular interest

to children or relevant to their development as individuals. In a widely circulated 1878 essay

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[80] Carroll, *The Game of Logic* (London: Macmillan, 1887).

[81] Blake, *Play, Games, and Sports*, 61.

[82] As I demonstrate in the third chapter of this project, A.A. Milne's characters in his *Pooh* stories experience a similar expansion of scale through communal meaning-making and shared linguistic play.

[83] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 266.

titled "Child's Play," Scottish novelist and poet Robert Louis Stevenson (also known for his children's adventure book, *Treasure Island* [1883]) had asserted that children far preferred play over games because the former allowed children to imitate, pretend, and make believe in order to create narratives about an otherwise inscrutable world. [84] Games, by contrast (according to Stevenson) were fixed and tautological in scope: "Cricket, which is a mere matter of dexterity, palpably about nothing, and for no end," he wrote dismissively, "often fails to satisfy infantile craving. It is a game, if you like, but not a game of play. You cannot tell yourself a story about cricket; and the activity it calls forth can be justified on no rational theory."[85] Even Sewell reaffirms this perspective when she posits that games entail "the active manipulation, serving no useful purpose, of a certain object or class of objects, concrete or mental…within a limited sphere of space and time and according to fixed rules, with the aim of producing a given result despite the opposition of chance and/or opponents."[86] Carroll's personal fascination with inventing elaborate game variations throughout his lifetime for his child friends, however, coupled with his decision to transform a conventional game such as chess into a dynamic narrative such as Alice's, makes it clear that for even games "within a limited sphere of space and time" and seeming to "[serve] no useful purpose" are never truly self-contained or static. Rather, for the author they are always the products of a particular historical moment and

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[84] In fact, the Oxford English Dictionary attributes the first usage of the word "pretend" in a make-believe context to *Through the Looking-Glass.* The OED defines "to pretend" here as "to feign or simulate in play, to make playful pretence; to imagine oneself *to be*; to make-believe *that*" (pretend *v.*, *Oxford English Dictionary*, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/150938 [accessed 30 April 2017]).

[85] Robert Louis Stevenson, "Child's Play," in *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1895), 168, https://archive.org/details/virginibuspueri00stev (accessed 18 May 2017).

[86] Sewell, *Field of Nonsense,* 27.

expanding, fantastic world context.[87] In other words, Carroll suggests that Alice's childlike

ability to both play and participate in the Looking-Glass creatures' dynamic games, at a much

broader level, is defined by ongoing Victorian debates surrounding the evolution of the English

language, history, and the young individual's relationship to an ever-widening global network of

speakers.

The Global Scale of Games: Anglo-Saxon, the Child, and England's Ethnographic Histories

As Lecercle, Patricia Meyer Spacks, and Carole Scott have variously observed, at the

core of Alice's problematic encounters with linguistic games in the Looking-Glass world is the

undeniable sense that language—specifically the English language—is never stable or self-

contained. In previous decades, English philosophers such as John Stuart Mill had examined the

lack of relationship between abstract names and the objects to which they referred, as well as the

complex degrees of naming—concrete, abstract, general, collective, connotative, non-

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[87] Carroll's affinity for inventing and publishing games—frequently for his child
friends—has been studied comprehensively by several scholars, including Edward Wakeling,
Martin Gardner, and most recently, Christopher Morgan. Some of these games were variations of
existing games; perhaps the most well-known example appeared in Carroll's first published
pamphlet, *Court Circular* (1860), which (the subtitle reveals) is "*A New Game of Cards for Two
or More Players.*" Other Carrollian inventions used familiar game pieces but in ways that were
entirely unrelated to the original game. A notable instance of this is Lanrick, a two-player game
played on a chessboard using chess pawns but with completely new rules. Carroll's
preoccupation with constantly altering and perfecting the rules for his games (most of which are
for multiple players) is evidenced here; Lanrick underwent multiple revisions, with early
versions relying (in the author's own words) "too much on chance, and the later versions…too
complex" (Carroll, *Games, Puzzles, & Related Pieces*, ed. Christopher Morgan, vol. 5 of *The
Pamphlets of Lewis Carroll*, ed. Mark Burstein [New York: Lewis Carroll Society of North
America, 2015], 49). This sense of rules' ability to evolve certainly influences the instability and
inscrutability of rules in the Looking-Glass world.

connotative, and so forth—that characterized in-depth studies of language.[88] As Williams notes, Carroll—who was fascinated by wordplay's slipperiness—was situated in Oxford during a period when writings such as Mill's were being read, and particularly when philology began to gain traction as a serious discipline.[89] Carroll was also acutely aware of the difficulties that would confront those future generations attempting to master or even create a cohesive narrative about the evolution of English as a language. Max Müller, who became a member of Christ Church, Oxford in 1851—the same year that young Carroll entered the college—was a friend of Carroll's, as well as an influential figure within the university's philological community; seventeen years later, he would also become Oxford's first Professor of Comparative Philology.[90] In his "Lectures on the Science of Language," originally delivered in 1863, Müller emphasized the idea that all languages—even those that might once have shared a common ancestor—followed a fundamentally nonlinear pattern of development once they were transmitted to different regions of the world and appropriated by new groups of speakers. "Language, though its growth is governed by intelligible principles throughout," he posited, "was not so uniform in its progress as to repeat exactly the same phenomena at every stage of its life." Instead, he compared philology to another branch of science that approached geographical and historical idiosyncrasies with a holistic, critical eye: "As the geologist looks for different characteristics when he has to deal with London clay, with Oxford clay, or with old red sandstone, the student of language, too, must be prepared for different formations, even though

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[88] John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1865), 1:27-31.

[89] Williams, "Lewis Carroll and the Private Life of Words," 651.

[90] Max Müller, *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Friedrich Max Müller*, ed. Georgina Adelaide Müller (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902), 1:128.

he confines himself to one stage in the history of language."[91] This holistic approach would allow philologists to understand English not as a language with a teleological origin story, but as a constantly morphing global artifact.

Müller further argued that, in some ways, this language had become devalued rather than improved by its long historical proliferation. In the same lecture, the philologist thus declared:

> The Anglo-Saxon stands much higher than the modern English—its grammar is more fully developed, its words are more expressive, and there is but a small admixture of foreign words. The English language therefore developed in a direction very nearly opposite to that of the political history of England, and while to the historian every subsequent period seems to advance a step further towards improvement & perfection, the student of language sees in the later phases of English speech – I speak of the grammatical system only—nothing but the slow corruption of the pure Anglo-Saxon.[92]

According to Müller, the true philologist did not simply examine language by isolating particular parts or patterns of speech; instead, he engaged in a comprehensive comparative study of geopolitical contexts in order to trace the (always elusive) history of a language. Above all, Müller believed that the shift of the English language away from its Anglo-Saxon roots had occurred concurrently with the expansion of British imperialism—that is to say, that Britain's political and linguistic pasts were inverted reflections of one another, rather than positively

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[91] Müller, *Lectures on the science of language: delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in February, March, April, and May, 1863* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1865): 32.

[92] Müller, unpublished 1851 lectures, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Eng. d.2353, f.40v–f.41r. quoted in Williams, "Lewis Carroll and the Private Life of Words," 664.

correlated phenomena.[93]

This sense of political and linguistic inversion finds its way with startling tenacity into many of Alice's most fantastic encounters, but perhaps none so boldly as in her interactions with the Unicorn halfway through the novel. As with many of the Looking-Glass episodes, this chapter—titled "The Lion and the Unicorn"—is based on the well-known nursery rhyme: in it, the lion (which represents England on the royal coat of arms of the United Kingdom) and the unicorn (which represents Scotland) battle for the crown and are eventually "drummed out of town" for their mischief. Carroll's lively rendition of this rhyme offers a bricolage of satirical devices, whose targets include not only the longstanding political strife between England and Scotland, but also the nineteenth-century revival of interest in Anglo-Saxon history—a history that is inevitably caught up in the discourse of linguistic colonization, as well as exoticization of the Other. Upon spotting Alice, for instance, the Unicorn turns away instantly in disgust and, with his back turned, addresses a nearby messenger named Haigha (pronounced, as the narrator earlier informs us, "so as to rhyme with 'mayor'")[94]:

> "What—is—this?" [the Unicorn] said at last.
>
> "This is a child!" Haigha replied eagerly, coming in front of Alice to introduce
>
> her, and spreading out both his hands towards her in an Anglo-Saxon attitude. "We only

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[93] In *A History of the English Language*, David Denison and Richard Hogg explain that by the middle of the nineteenth century, the British Empire accounted for approximately a quarter of both the land and population of the world. "One obvious linguistic effect on English of Britain's imperial expansion," they explain, "was the incorporation of lexical borrowings from a wide range of languages…The more important effect was to transplant the English language to lands in at least four continents beyond Europe, some of which would eventually come to rival and even overtake the homeland in importance" ([Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 21). This analysis further reinforces the strong connection that Carroll sensed between Britain's fraught political history and the development—or increasing difficulty—of English as a language.

[94] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 279.

found it to-day. It's as large as life, and twice as natural!"

"I always thought they were fabulous monsters!" said the Unicorn. "Is it alive?"

"It can talk," said Haigha solemnly.

The Unicorn looked dreamily at Alice, and said "Talk, child."[95]

The Unicorn's haughtiness, coupled with Haigha's eagerness to present Alice as a species—that

is, a child—culminates in a joke about what some Victorian philologists perceived as language's

potential to reveal one's human status: "Talk, child," the Unicorn commands, as if the ability to

articulate language is Alice's only hope of proving that she is not simply a "fabulous monster"

but rather a real, language-uttering individual.

Embedded in the phrase "fabulous monster" is also the uneasy implication (made, as I

mention in the first section of this chapter, by preeminent scientists such as Haeckel and

Chambers) that the human child was closer to an animal-like or savage state than were adults. As

Veronica Schanoes observes, moments such as this one emphasize "the affinity between children

and monsters" by stressing "the relative nature of the category of the monster"—and, by

extension, the category of the child as well.[96] But at this time, these ideas of relative humanity

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[95] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 287. Beyond its linguistic and political dimensions, this chapter is filled with a plethora of jokes—on which Victorian readers would have been quick to pick up—that are too varied to cover here in any comprehensive way, but a few are worth noting in particular. Gardner suggests in his notes to the *Annotated Alice*, for example, that "it was widely believed in England that Tenniel's lion and unicorn, in the illustration for this scene, were intended as caricatures of [Liberal politician William Ewart] Gladstone and [Conservative Benjamin Disraeli] respectively" (288). The Unicorn's comment about "fabulous monsters" also echoes some of the natural historian discourse that is (as I have previously shown) so prevalent throughout *Alice in Wonderland.* Both the Unicorn and Haigha treat Alice as an exotic creature, an "it" and a "child" rather than a "her" and an individual; their self-satisfied observations that she is "large as life, and twice as natural" humorously suggest that she is a specimen come to life from the drawings of a Victorian natural history book.

[96] Veronica Schanoes, "Fearless Children and Fabulous Monsters: Angela Carter, Lewis Carroll, and Beastly Girls," *Marvels & Tales* 26, no. 1 (2012): 31.

were also being explored elsewhere: in the annals of comparative philology, languages of non-Western origin (namely, what were known as the "Oriental" languages) quickly became immersed in larger questions of early human civilization and development. In April 1866, the *American Phrenological Journal* published an unassigned piece that opens by citing a prevalent Western perception of the East: according to this view, the Asian nations had "long ago given way to stagnation" and, "as their ancestors lived in the past, so do they."[97] In the remainder of the article, however, the author highlights the extent to which Europeans in fact owed most of their current lifestyles to the earliest of Oriental inventions, which ranged from language ("a school-boy," the author notes, "can tell the meaning of the Sanscrit words sacchara canda") to modern laws ("a thousand years before it had occurred to [the European] to enact laws of restriction in the use of intoxicating drinks, the prophet of Mecca did the same thing"). Notably, this register of borrowed inventions also included games made for personal amusement: "As regards the pastimes of private life," the writer concluded, "Europe has produced no invention that can rival the game of chess."[98] For this writer as for Carroll, even the most familiar cultural artifacts—from language and ritual to laws and games—could not be analyzed apart from their ethnographic histories, despite the prevailing popular impulse to do precisely that.

The joke about linguistic origins and evolution continues to unfold in the narrator's references to the "Anglo-Saxon attitudes" of his fictional messenger, which satirize then-fashionable scholarship that romanticized Anglo-Saxon as the key to unlocking England's illusive past. One such work, titled *A Guide to the Anglo-Saxon Tongue*, declares its purpose as "being to teach pure Anglo-Saxon only," since "no Englishman…altogether ignorant of Anglo-

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[97] "On Ethnology: What We Owe to Asia," *American Phrenological Journal* 43, no. 4 (1866): 132.

[98] "On Ethnology," 132.

Saxon can have a thorough knowledge of his own mother-tongue."[99] While studies such as this

one were concerned with creating a cohesive historical and linguistic narrative from Anglo-

Saxon past to English present, Carroll's caricature of Haigha (whose name plays on the

popularization of the dropped "h" sound in fashionable Victorian circles) suggests that these

pursuits were both ineffectual and biasedly self-serving. In a series of important writings titled

Chips from a German Workshop (1867-75), Müller criticized the ethnocentric impetus behind

the establishment of these types of Anglo-Saxon studies at Oxford:

> The foundation of a chair of Anglo-Saxon was due not so much to a patriotic
>
> interest excited by the ancient national literature of the Saxons, still less to the importance
>
> of that ancient language for philological studies, but it received its first impulses from the
>
> divines of the sixteenth century, who wished to strengthen the position of the English
>
> Church in its controversy with the Church of Rome…Without this practical interest,
>
> Anglo-Saxon would hardly have excited so much interest in the sixteenth century, and
>
> Oxford would probably have remained much longer without its professorial chair of the
>
> ancient national language of England.[100]

Here, Müller emphasizes the idea that assigning comparative values to different languages within

philological studies is, in itself, always a politically charged and culturally motivated act.

This is particularly true when one considers the intellectual climate surrounding a project

that was then unfolding at Oxford, a project that Müller himself highly favored and that

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[99] Edward Johnston Vernon, *A Guide to the Anglo-Saxon Tongue: a grammar after Erasmus Rask, extracts in prose and verse, with notes, etc. for the use of learners, and an appendix* (London: John Russell Smith, 1872), https://archive.org/details/guidetoanglosaxo00verniala (accessed 17 May 2017).

[100] Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1881), 4:12-13, https://archive.org/details/germanwork04mulluoft (accessed 17 May 2017).

progressed under the editorship of James Murray. Plans for creating *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*—which later became known as the *Oxford English Dictionary*—began as early as 1858, when the Philological Society published a formal *Proposal for the Publication of a New English Dictionary*.[101] Influenced in part by Richard Chenevix Trench's 1857 lectures on the deficiencies in existing English lexicons, and in equal part by rising interest in comparative philology (cultivated by other scholars including Jacob Grimm, orientalist William Jones [Samuel Johnson's associate], and Rasmus Rask), the Society declared its mission to create a comprehensive dictionary that would document the historical evolution of English words and offer a richer alternative to the anachronistic lexicography used in Johnson's theretofore authoritative *Dictionary*.[102] Specifically, Murray argued that the purpose of such a dictionary would be to create a complete inventory of the English language, in which the dictionary-maker would be a historian rather than a selective curator: "I am not the editor of the English language," he insisted in one correspondence. "I am too busy to set up as a general referee on English words."[103] Likewise, Lynda Mugglestone observes in her study of the *OED*'s lengthy creation that Murray and the other dictionary contributors refused to allow their lexicon to simply become "an indubitable authority, providing linguistic laws by which the language would be regulated and refined."[104] Rather—and rather like the characters of Carroll's fantasy world—Murray recognized the inherently mutable and eclectic nature of language, which relied on a

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[101] Lynda Mugglestone, *Lost for Words: The Hidden History of the Oxford English Dictionary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 8.

[102] Mugglestone, *Lost for Words*, 6.

[103] J.A.H. Murray to unnamed correspondent, 21 October 1911, quoted in Mugglestone, *Lost for Words*, 144-45.

[104] Mugglestone, *Lost for Words*, 143.

multicultural history of diversity and dynamism to reach its current state.

An important indicator of this belief is signaled by the fact that the makers of the *OED* collaborated closely with another pair of lexicographers, Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, who in 1886 would publish a "definitive glossary of British India" titled *Hobson-Johnson.* According to Kate Teltscher, the *OED* borrowed many of *Hobson-Johnson*'s definitions and quotations "both with and without acknowledgement"—more than 500 *Hobson-Johnson* borrowings, in fact, in its many subsequent editions. "The entry of words of Asian origin [such as those found in *Hobson-Johnson*] into the national lexicon," Teltscher concludes, offered "a striking example of the manner in which India remade British culture."[105] As debates surrounding the compilation of a comprehensive English lexicon intensified toward the end of the nineteenth century at Oxford, the reality that the English language was a richly global rather than national product could no longer be overlooked. This growing interest in philological diversity, in turn, would offer Carroll a much more concrete way to consider the tension between the ever-shifting nature of language and the often ethnocentric accounts of *The History of England* presented to children such as his young protagonist.

It is no accident, then, that these intensely debated branches of philological and historical inquiry come to a fore when Alice's status as a child is called into question for the first time during her encounter with the Unicorn. As a young girl who has previously learned the importance of navigating the slippery rules of language, Alice quickly adapts to the strange scene unfolding before her, a scene populated by characters that seem to be pulled haphazardly from a history of England and reassembled without any regard for order or sense. The Anglo-Saxon messenger, together with the anthropomorphized animal symbols of England and Scotland on the

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[105] Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Johnson: The Definitive Glossary of British India*, ed. Kate Teltscher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xii.

British royal coat of arms, converge to create a pastiche of English history; unlike the tidy

"histories of England" that Alice has been accustomed to reading in school, however, this

fantastic reimagining is entirely anachronistic, with characters that are so removed from their

respective historical contexts that they only vaguely resemble their ostensible analogues.[106] As

Williams notes, the problematic narratives that make up British antiquity haunt the *Alice* stories

in various forms, from the Mouse's dry speech about William the Conquerer in *Alice in*

Wonderland to Humpty Dumpty's self-assured reflection that his story is written somewhere in a

book, or "what you call a History of England."[107] If Alice has learned anything through her

encounter with Humpty Dumpty, however, it is that there is no single linear narrative of the

"History of England," particularly not in the Looking-Glass world where temporality, rules, and

sovereignty are conflated constantly. As she later remarks when the Red and White Queens fall

asleep on either side of her: "'I don't think it *ever* happened before, that any one had to take care

of two Queens asleep at once! No, not in all the History of England—it couldn't, you know,

because there never was more than one Queen at a time.'"[108] Of course, this type of oddly scaled

historical convergence happens repeatedly in the Looking-Glass realm—and although Alice is

often quite flustered by these types of occurrences, Carroll suggests that his child protagonist is

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[106] Roger Lancelyn Green identifies Havilland Chepmell's *Short Course of History* (1862) as a source cited at least once by Carroll (in *Alice in Wonderland*, during the Mouse's long "dry" speech about William the Conquerer). According to Mugglestone, other popular histories—and of England, specifically—include that written by Edith Thompson, whose *History of England* was in print for some thirty years toward the end of the nineteenth century; James Anthony Froude's *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (1870); and David Hume's *The History of England: from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution of 1688*, which appeared in six volumes and was last updated by Hume in 1778 (*Lost for Words*, xiv).

[107] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 264 and Williams, "Lewis Carroll and the Private Life of Words," 669.

[108] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 327.

also uniquely positioned to adapt to this shifting (and increasingly global) nature of history, in large part because her prior exposure to other characters' dynamic language and logic games has prepared her for it.

This, then, is the level of intellectual and historical engagement that drives Carroll's decision to frame the entire *Alice* novel as one giant, make-believe game of chess. As the author was well aware, the Eastern origins of chess—as well as its eclectic evolution as it moved from the East to the West—made the game an exceptionally well-suited backdrop for Alice's globally expanding adventures through a fantastic landscape. In *British Chess*, for example, Kenneth Matthews examines the rich history behind the invention of modern chess, which originated in the regions of Persia and north-west India; from there, it quickly spread from one territory to the next as conquering armies and other passing groups carried the game with them back to their homelands. "From Europe," Matthews explains, "the game fanned out over the five continents: colonists planted it in the Americas; the Russians took it across Asia; the British re-exported it to India, where it had arisen. Modern chess is a composite achievement of practically every country in the world."[109] Given this history, which would have been only too familiar to avid chess players such as Carroll, there is an undeniably globally-minded quality in the author's decision to set up a fantasy world that invokes this dynamic, intercultural history of chess. Alice herself in fact expresses heightened awareness about the geographical boundlessness that characterizes the Looking-Glass world when—standing at the top of a hill beside the Red Queen—she looks out at the country laid out before her and exclaims with delight: "It's a great huge game of chess that's being played—all over the world—if this *is* the world at all, you know. Oh, how fun it is!"[110] Her

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[109] Kenneth Matthews, *British Chess* (London: Clark & Sherwell, 1948), 10.

[110] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 207-8.

remark highlights chess's ability to reveal the interconnectedness of the Looking-Glass land: here, the vast scale of the game challenges the young protagonist to think critically about whether "the world" as she knows it could be only part of a much larger, unknown, and therefore exciting world beyond. In other words, by participating in what she initially views as a fun game, Alice is also better prepared to explore a new, expansive terrain that draws from a rich variety of global cultures and histories.

It is, then, fitting that the land through the looking-glass and its chessboard configuration often transports Alice to different—and sometimes even exotic—locales without warning or explanation, thus allowing her to experience all sorts of terrains beyond her own familiar world.[111] This is particularly true of one scene in which Alice, who has just become a pawn in the game, makes "a grand survey of the country she was going to travel through. 'It's something very like learning geography,'" she observes thoughtfully, before detailing to herself various features of the landscape. Although she cannot find any "principal rivers" or "principal towns"— terms used regularly in Victorian geographical surveys of Britain, as well as British travel narratives about the East —she soon notices something that she has never before encountered at home: giant, bee-like creatures, bustling around in the flowers a mile off. As the narrator reveals, however, she is mistaken: "This was anything but a regular bee: in fact, it was an elephant—as

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[111] After her conversation with the Unicorn, for instance, Alice jumps over a little brook and into the seventh square, thinking to herself that "she must have been dreaming about the Lion and the Unicorn and those queer Anglo-Saxon Messengers" because the scene around her has dissolved entirely (Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 293). In another scene, Alice and the White Queen cross into the next square, whereupon the latter suddenly transforms into a Sheep and the two of them are standing inside a dark shop; at the end of the chapter, Alice wanders toward an egg on the shelf only to find that it has transformed into Humpty Dumpty, who is perched on top of a precariously narrow wall next to a tree. Significantly, these types of physical and spatial changes are externally rather than internally located. Alice herself does not undergo any of the bewildering shifts in size that she experiences in the first novel; rather, as Gardner observes, these changes are replaced "by equally bewildering changes of place, occasioned of course by the movements of chess pieces over the board" (*Annotated Alice*, 172).

Alice soon found out, though the idea quite took her breath away at first."[112]

The virtually unexplained appearance of this exotic animal in the Looking-Glass world is significant for several reasons. First, it is the only such creature of its kind throughout Alice's adventures: unlike the anthropomorphized animals or entirely fantastic beasts that she encounters in other scenes, the elephant remains at a safe, unapproached range from Alice, who chooses to keep her distance; upon running down the hill to meet it, she immediately checks herself and decides aloud that she "won't go *just* yet," all the while "trying to find some excuse for turning shy so suddenly."[113] The uncharacteristic shyness that Alice exhibits in this moment accentuates the tension between pure fantasy, on the one hand, and the fantastic-seeming exoticism associated with Eastern landscapes, on the other hand: if she feels at ease engaging with creatures such as the Unicorn or Lion but not an elephant, perhaps it is in part because the latter is paradoxically both *too* real and exotic for her fantasy world. As one observer noted in an excerpt that appeared in *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* in 1832:

> To give a description of the elephant would seem superfluous: man has been familiar with it from the remotest times; it has been the auxiliary of armies, the pride of princes, the servant of merchants, and one of the chief attractions of every menagerie. All sorts of persons, from the sage to the showman, have thus combined to set forth the appearance, the magnitude, and the sagacity of the elephant, till, if the brute that roams the thick forests of India could read, it would really not know its own history.[114]

Alice's refusal to engage with this multifaceted, inscrutable history exposes a key point of

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[112] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 215-16.

[113] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 216.

[114] "The Elephant," *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, 11 August 1832.

tension in Carroll's increasingly expansive narrative. By pursuing what she views as the end goal of the game—moving forward and becoming a queen, rather than going backwards to see these colossal animals ("I may visit the elephants later on," she exclaims, adding: "Besides, I *do* so want to get into the Third Square!")—the child protagonist reveals that her understanding of space, history, and development is largely linear. As a consequence, she overlooks the inevitably global and historically complex influences in the game she is playing: in an interesting note on the history of chess, H.J.R. Murray observes that elephants could be found as pieces in some of the earliest Indian versions of the game; these animals occupied the position that would later be replaced by the bishop in modern European versions, though the former's movements were much less restricted than those of their later counterparts. [115] The elephants that Alice sees from afar are strikingly reminiscent of these ancient chess pieces, but—critically—she fails to recognize them as such because she is acquainted only with their modern British evolutions: queens, kings, knights, and so forth. So that while the young protagonist repeatedly proves that she knows the history of England as presented by various textbooks and primers, Carroll makes it clear here that this knowledge has not yet allowed her to fully grasp the cultural and temporal complexity of the central game in which she is participating: namely, a game of immensely global proportions such as chess.

In scenes such as this one, Carroll carefully reframes readers' expectations about the rules governing the game of chess in order to expose the inherent instability that characterizes both historical and individual development in the Looking-Glass world. Frida Beckman helpfully remarks on this dynamic when she writes: "When Carroll's text introduces the game of chess, it does not confirm the organization of space which this game implies but, quite on the contrary, it

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[115] H.J.R. Murray, *A History of Chess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), 27.

functions to upset the rules of institutionalized space…Rather than the strictly coded movement that the presence of the chess board seems to indicate, Alice's movement is characterized by a multiplicity of effects that deterritorialize space and time."[116] In other words, as traces of Eastern and Western landscapes meld together, and as past, present, and future become compressed into what seems to be a completely fantastic world, it becomes apparent that there can be no linear evolution from historical past to present; this world, like the world that Alice has left behind on the other side of the looking-glass, is filled with innumerable global networks that span far beyond Alice's comprehension, even if these networks converge much more dramatically and evidently in Carroll's fantasy land. As a consequence, her determination to become a queen must end with the revelation that her straightforward quest is incompatible with the inchoate and multidirectional rules that occur through the looking-glass. For this is a world in which multiple queens can exist side by side and none have real sovereignty in the land over which they ostensibly rule; in which language can mean what one chooses it to mean, and nothing more; in which one can scream in pain first, and prick her finger afterward, and in which the rule is "jam to-morrow and jam yesterday—but never jam *to-day*."[117] So that, although Alice occasionally views development as a teleological process that is intricately tied to one's individual (and national) identity, Carroll's point here is therefore clear: none of the games Alice plays in the Looking-Glass world are isolated from global contexts, and especially not the game of chess around which her make-believe world is centered.

And in many ways, these moments of fantastic outward expansion are precisely the types of shifts that make some of Alice's most bewildering, scattered experiences in the Looking-Glass

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[116] Frida Beckman, "Becoming Pawn: Alice, Arendt and the New in Narrative," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 44, no. 1 (2014): 22-23.

[117] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 247.

land into a much more connected narrative about what Carroll saw as the critical relationship among games, the child, and nineteenth-century global dynamism. At the end of the novel, Alice famously picks up the Red Queen and shakes her until "it really *was* a kitten, after all." This sudden transformation from fantasy back into reality mirrors the ending of Wonderland, when Alice wakes up to find that the pack of cards that she imagines to be descending on her are actually dead leaves that have fluttered down from the trees onto her face. The critical difference is that, in this novel, Alice has been playing all along: as Holly Virginia Blackford observes, the *Alice* sequel "realized and commented upon what [Carroll] had achieved in the earlier wonderland novel by putting Alice's play in the foreground. Not only is the entire fantasy world a cosmic chess game—paradoxically free and bounded by rules, yet abruptly shifting meaning— but the entry into the fantasy world comes not with a white rabbit but with Alice's pretend play."[118] Unlike in Wonderland, Alice has finally become an active player that uses make-believe to imagine and experience an entire world, one whose richness, unfixable rules, and boundless diversity seem to expand beyond even its creator's comprehension. If Alice's anarchic playfulness at the beginning and end of the novel appears to be at odds with the rule-bound structures of the games that she encounters in the Looking-Glass world, Carroll defies this expectation by demonstrating that such rules are never truly fixed because both historical contexts and individual imagination can—and will—continue to shape even the most familiar games in ever-evolving ways.

In the end, then, Carroll's novel offers a thought-provoking account of what it might mean for his child protagonist to encounter the expansive world through activities that his contemporaries had traditionally associated with the individual child's development, but had

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[118] Holly Virginia Blackford, "Apertures into the House of Fiction: Novel Methods and Child Study, 1870-1910," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2007): 375.

rarely used to connect the child to the broader global networks that she inevitably inhabited. In other words, he reimagines the scales of ongoing debates surrounding not only the child and issues of identity, but also the place of the child in a world that teems with opportunities for intellectual stimulation and worldview expansion. Never one to underestimate the imaginative potential of children, Carroll thus reconsiders the idea that play is simply fun and games: rather, his second novel suggests that fantasy, make-believe, and games, taken together, are the media through which the child first truly experiences the expansive world beyond herself. Here, then, is perhaps another one of Carroll's most fascinating literary reversals: for if *Alice in Wonderland* focuses on Alice's ability to navigate the ever-changing natural environments of a fantastic land and still maintain her identity as an individual, *Through the Looking-Glass* broadens the scale of the child's imagination once more to include rich histories and global elements that expand far beyond the individual child. Ultimately, however, the two novels share a sense that the child's experiences of the world are never self-contained or purely self-referential, but instead woven into dynamic discourses that emphasize the diversity and nonlinearity of those experiences. In turn, this important recognition—that individual singularity and global connectedness are equally critical to the child's developing sense of self—produces for Carroll a timeless child protagonist whose lively, boundless imagination allows her to claim both—a protagonist that can, in the White Queen's own words, "believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast" and then some, after all.[119]

As I have asserted in this chapter, important issues in the *Alice* stories such as self-identity and adaptation acquire new meaning in the context of the scientific, historical, and cultural ideas according to which these narratives operate more broadly. Such concerns were not,

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[119] Carroll, *Annotated Alice*, 251.

however, experiments in intellectual and literary expansion that would end with an author such as Carroll. Far from it: as I suggest in the chapters that follow, strikingly similar preoccupations would become equally (if not more) central to a number of later children's fantasy writers who not only wanted to reimagine the world in which they lived, but also to explore the possible narratives they could tell about an ever-changing world. The constant literary transformation and evolution that characterize literary fantasy would offer these writers an important space through which they could cognize these ongoing explorations of storytelling, globalization, and meaning-making. To this end, Carroll establishes a particularly useful foundation for my broader analysis of these subsequent writers' visions, and not simply because (as Harvey Darton once observed) the *Alice* books marked a critical shift in the tenor of children's literature. [120] Rather, I demonstrate in what follows that the significant critical attention achieved by the Carroll novels also prompts us to reevaluate the dearth of comparable scholarship in many other areas of children's fantasy, which remains overwhelmingly mired in conversations about childishness, biographical projection, and psychoanalysis. J.M. Barrie—author of the famous *Peter Pan* stories—has been exceptionally suspect to critiques of boyish nostalgia, in large part because his particular version of fantasy (featuring a young boy who never grows up) is so openly preoccupied with issues of stasis and temporality. Even so, Barrie's characters often embody a type of incongruent physical scale that enables the author to engage critically with what he perceived to be critical problems of storytelling, authorship, and histories of narrative creation. In the following chapter, I examine the ways in which these incompatible scales position Barrie's versions of *Peter Pan* within ongoing discussions about genre, literary metamorphosis, and the authorization of narratives.

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[120] Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 54.

Chapter 2

Authorizing Narratives: The Evolution of Storytelling in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* Myth

The ubiquitous nature of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* stories has made it difficult to discuss these works' representations of childhood and time without simply retreading familiar critical territory. The scales of temporality and space that characterize Barrie's fantasy island, the unaging boy protagonist Peter Pan, as well as the psychoanalytic and biographical impulses that inform the author's writing—these topics are particular favorites among scholars of his work, and all have found varying degrees of traction within the canon of *Peter Pan* studies. Jacqueline Rose's well-known examination of Barrie's narrative, for example, *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984), famously argues that the figure of Peter Pan himself embodies asexual innocence, frozen in time by an adult author who desires to maintain an eternal illusion of that innocence.[1] What follows here, however, is not yet another in-depth study of the mythic origins of Peter or his problematic relationship with growing up: there are many such scholarly treatments available, the best known of which include Roger Lancelyn Green's classic *Fifty Years of Peter Pan* (1954), Leonee Ormond's *J.M. Barrie* (1987), Peter Hollindale's introduction to *Peter Pan and Other Plays* (1995), and Carol Mavor's *Reading Boyishly* (2008).[2] Rather, this chapter draws attention to the scales of narrative creation that emerge across the complex history of the Peter Pan myth, and especially the mutable quality of

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[1] Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984).

[2] Roger Lancelyn Green, *Fifty Years of* Peter Pan (London: Peter Davies, 1954); Leonee Ormond, *J.M. Barrie* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987); J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, ed. Peter Hollindale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Carol Mavor, *Reading Boyishly: Roland Barthes, J.M. Barrie, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Marcel Proust, and D.W. Winnicott* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

stories that—paradoxically—need to be reimagined constantly in order to achieve some level of permanence.

My analysis examines the shifting representations of storytelling and authorship that occur across three versions of the Peter Pan legend: *The Little White Bird* (1901), his dramatic *Peter Pan* (first performed in 1904 and later published—with significant revisions—in 1928), and his novelized version *Peter and Wendy* (1911). By tracing the evolutions of these works over time, we begin to see different structures of storytelling emerge through some of Barrie's most marginalized characters, whose positions of incongruity within his narrative are critical to understanding the author's endless revisions of his original tale. These figures never quite seem to fit the narratives that attempt to contain them: instead, their odd literary scaling allows them to access the expansive origins, development, and futures of stories in ways that remain unreachable for even Barrie's most recognizable characters. Since the forms in which the author's stories appeared are important to parsing the functions of these characters, this chapter also distinguishes between the visual incongruities of Barrie's stage play, on the one hand, and the writtenness of his novels about Peter Pan, on the other hand.

In the first half of this chapter, I focus on the dramatic *Peter Pan* and its portrayal of a character named Liza, a serving-maid whose child-like stature and ostensible status as an adult make her an exceptionally unsettling presence on Barrie's stage. As I suggest, the playwright's ironic decision to list her in his original program as "Author of the Play" exemplifies his ongoing concern with the mutability of authorship and authorization, as well as with the many generic transformations that *Peter Pan* underwent during its early years of revision. (These changes in genre include the traditions of pantomime and the Harlequinade, clear traces of which can be found in almost no other character apart from Liza.) In the second half of this chapter, my

examination shifts toward the several figures of storytelling that appear in *The Little White Bird*, a novel that predates the dramatic *Peter Pan* but in many ways grapples—through prose—with similar questions of narrative creation and evolution. What differentiates this novel from Barrie's play is its particular preoccupation with the oral and written origins of stories, as well as its own status as an inaugural story. In this work, anachronistic figures such as Liza (a child-statured serving maid) and Irene (an impoverished girl whose love for recounting fairytales—specifically, "Cinderella"—aligns her with tales about a distant past) act as portals through which one can access narrative histories and beginnings. By contrast, *Peter and Wendy*—which was published at a time in Barrie's career when the Peter Pan legend had already undergone countless revisions and adaptations—features an unnamed narrator that can no longer access past narratives, but looks instead toward the countless future possibilities that might emerge from the stories that he tells. Through this narration, which operates according to multiple competing narrative temporalities, Barrie reveals a growing awareness that his tales about Peter Pan would never be complete; instead, they would continue to change and evolve in ways that even the author himself could not anticipate fully throughout his lifelong writing career. Taken together, then, these two novels—along with the dramatic *Peter Pan*—illuminate the ways in which Barrie's conceptions of narrative creation evolved along with his stories, creating the enduring sense of literary renewal and proliferation that remains to this day associated with the name of "Peter Pan."

1. Growing Up Betwixt-and-between: The Scales of Transformation and Genre

in the Dramatic Peter Pan

"Betwixt-and-between": the term is a familiar one to any reader of the *Peter Pan* stories.

Peter, the young boy who will not grow up, captures J.M. Barrie's fanciful phrase in every ideal

and iteration imaginable: from his debut in *The Little White Bird* to his animated frivolity in

Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953) and recent appearance in Joe Wright's on-screen prequel, *Pan* (2015),

Peter may be a boy but he is also always on the verge of reverting into something else—

something ephemeral, elusive, eternal.[3] "I'm youth, I'm joy…I'm a little bird that has broken out

of the egg," the boy ventures triumphantly when his nemesis, Captain Hook, demands to know

who he really is.[4] Like Peter, the young maid Liza is a character that occupies several uneasy

categories of physical, temporal, and diegetic betweenness. In what follows, I argue that Liza's

peculiar brand of liminality exposes the central tension among transformation, genre, and

narrative creation that undergirds *Peter Pan*'s complex publication history. Her ability to exceed

the very scales that she is meant to embody—she is alternately girl/mother, youth/adult,

human/specter, servant/leader, and character/author—naturally grants her a unique status of

indefinition across the many iterations of Barrie's original narrative. What is perhaps most

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[3] In *The Little White Bird*, Barrie employs this term to describe eponymous protagonist, who is at once an eternal youth and what a crow named Solomon Caw describes as a "Betwixt-and-Between," neither fully boy nor bird. As the first-person adult narrator of this novel reflects: "David [the narrator's young friend] knows that all children in our part of London were once birds in the Kensington Gardens; and that the reason there are bars on nursery windows and a tall fender by the fire is because very little people sometimes forget that they have no longer wings, and try to fly away through the window or up the chimney" ([New York: Charles Scribner's & Sons, 1925], 21). Even in later appearances, Peter maintains a sense of this flightiness: in some versions of *Peter Pan,* the narrative even reveals that he cannot be touched by anyone but the fairies.

[4] J.M. Barrie, *The Annotated Peter Pan*, ed. Maria Tatar (New York: Norton, 2011), 145.

remarkable about this marginal character, however, is the extent to which the author also conceived of her as an internalization of the endless generic and narrative transformations that his own story would undergo over the years. Several characteristics in particular demarcate Liza as a site of changing metanarrative: she is the only character to appear in both Neverland and England (with a fluidity that rivals that of *Peter and Wendy*'s first-person narrator); with her Harlequin's wand, she is also a clear remnant of the later eliminated pantomime tradition that Barrie incorporated into early versions of the play. Liza's developmental fluidity, moreover, affords her special access to arenas to which other characters—even Peter Pan himself—are never made privy: namely, a claim to original authorship of—and arguably even authorization over—the evolving narrative of *Peter Pan* itself.

If Liza exerts a surprising amount of authority over the dynamic narrative and generic histories that she inhabits, it follows that we must also reconsider what it means, for Barrie, to be always on the periphery (rather than at the center) of such literary histories, especially one as convoluted as the *Peter Pan* myth. It is precisely this quality of marginality, after all, that makes Liza such an exceptional illustration of Barrie's lifelong commitment to literary experimentation and revision, despite the fact that Liza herself has since faded considerably from modern adaptations of Barrie's work. For the Scottish author and playwright, the persistent adaptability of this otherwise overlooked character suggests that the very experience of inhabiting peripheral betweenness serves as a vehicle for seeing both oneself and the world in their entireties, and—by extension—for creating narratives that are universal, enduring, and always in the process of being rewritten.

Since the inaugural performance of *Peter Pan* on 27 December 1904, reviewers and

scholars alike have been absorbed by the contrasting representations of growth and stagnated

development in Barrie's work of fantasy. This history, though well-known, is central to Liza's

evolution as a character throughout Barrie's career and worth noting briefly. In 1902, the

character of Peter Pan made his first appearance in *The Little White Bird*, a novel that follows

multiple different arcs but also devotes several chapters to Peter's origin story.[5] These chapters

were later edited and published separately as *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* in 1906; two

years prior, the first theatrical performance of *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* had

also debuted at Duke of York's Theatre in London, starring Nina Boucicault as the ephemeral

boy protagonist. Barrie would spend the subsequent years endlessly revising and rewriting the

play, which appeared as the novel *Peter and Wendy* in 1911 and as a published drama only after

seventeen more years had passed. Although there are significant variations among these versions,

the later editions all tend to focus on the Darling children—Wendy, John, and Michael—who fly

away with Peter Pan to a fantasy island called Neverland, home to Peter's faithful band (the Lost

Boys) as well as their nemeses, Captain Hook and his pirate crew.

Much like the theory that the Lost Boys are really only "dead children" living on a

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[5] This early work describes a one-week old infant who has escaped from his unbarred bedroom window and flies away to Kensington Gardens, a safe haven where he can once more become like the bird that he had been when he was born. "He was quite unaware already that he had ever been human," the narrator reflects upon describing Peter's gay flight, "and thought he was a bird, even in appearance, just the same as in his early days" (Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 133). In the subsequent chapter, Peter flies home twice, only to find (on his second visit) that "the window was closed, and there were iron bars on it, and peering inside he saw his mother sleeping peacefully with her arm round another little boy" (172).

timeless island, the idea that Barrie viewed childhood and adulthood as antithetical to each

another—with little room for navigation in between—has captured overwhelm

ingly the popular imagination surrounding his story and its afterlives.[6] Perhaps the most

familiar of these critical approaches is the psychoanalytic argument that the author—in a

somewhat desperate attempt to preserve his real-life young friends the Llewelyn Davies boys in

an eternal Freudian state of static childhood—created the character of Peter Pan and a fantastic

world in which children would never need to grow up.[7] According to Judith Gero John, for

instance, the *Peter Pan* stories portray the movement from childhood to adulthood "not as a

maturing process, not as a growth process, but as a series of losses."[8] This sense of loss has also

led many scholars to perceive Barrie's depiction of growing up as a highly self-divisive, even

psychologically violent process: in another broadly representative observation, Ann Yeoman

asserts that motherly characters such as Mrs. Darling encapsulate the work's "lament for the

passing of springtime and for the inevitability of process and change, and at the same time

nostalgia for a world that is static, perfect and devoid of conflict."[9]

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[6] See Ann Wilson, "Hauntings: Anxiety, Technology, and Gender in *Peter Pan*," *Modern Drama* 43, no. 4 (2000): 595-610.

[7] The best-known of these is, as I have mentioned, Rose's controversial book, *The Case of Peter Pan*. Other studies of note include John Griffith, "Making Wishes Innocent: *Peter Pan*," *Lion and the Unicorn* 3, no.1 (1979): 28-37; Michael Egan, "The Neverland of Id," *Children's Literature* 10 (1982): 37-55; and Richard Rotert, "The Kiss in a Box," *Children's Literature* 18 (1990): 114-23.

[8] Judith Gero John, "The Legacy of Peter and Wendy: Images of Lost Innocence and Social Consequences in *Harriet the Spy*," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly, 1991 Proceedings* (1991): 169.

[9] Ann Yeoman, *Now or Neverland: Peter Pan and the Myth of Eternal Youth. A Psychological Perspective on a Cultural Icon* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1998), 96. There are of course (as John, Yeoman, and other scholars have also noted) many indisputably negative portrayals of the intrusion of passing time throughout Barrie's work, though they do not make up

More recently, however, critical studies of the *Peter Pan* story have begun to treat its portrayal of age and temporality as a much more complex literary experiment, one that challenges conventional Victorian yearnings for the innocent child and instead reveals the liminality that characterizes development from childhood to adulthood—or more precisely, between childhood and adulthood. In her theatrical analysis of Peter Pan, for example, Amanda Phillips Chapman asserts that competing contemporaneous values of childhood innocence and theater presence strained the fabric of Barrie's highly performative work. "An embodiment of both the Romantic ideal of unselfconscious childhood and the theatrical ideal of the child performer," she writes, "Peter himself is, in fact, quite uncanny in his combination of two seemingly antithetical paradigms."[10] Like Chapman, other scholars have also expressed renewed interest in studying the young protagonist's often elusive quality of betweenness.[11] What these new approaches tend to share is a common concern with the quality of inscrutable betweenness that characterizes Barrie's ageless protagonist, and particularly a fascination with his narrative's active resistance to representations of the growing child in early twentieth-century literature.

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the focus on my analysis. The crocodile that pursues Hook, along with the clock that continues to tick away inside of the animal's belly, offers perhaps the most well-known example of how relentless temporality dogs many of the individual characters in *Peter Pan*. R.D.S. Jack observes that the crocodile represents "an early emblem of time" when it finally devours Hook (R.D.S. Jack, "The Manuscript of *Peter Pan*," *Children's Literature* 18 [1990]: 105), while Egan posits that it is Hook's "indefatigable foe…Time itself" ("The Neverland of Id," 51). As Smee, Hook's right-hand pirate, also forebodingly muses to his captain: "Some day…the clock will run down, and then he'll get you" (Barrie, *The Annotated Peter Pan*, 74).

[10] Amanda Phillips Chapman, "The Riddle of Peter Pan's Existence: An Unselfconscious Stage Child," *Lion and the Unicorn* 36, no. 2 (2012): 143.

[11] In his recent examination of Peter Pan, Jonathan Padley thus calls upon scholars to analyze the youth not through psychoanalytic theory but rather through the lens of indefinition, since this framework (according to Padley) "functions first and foremost to reveal in Peter a protagonist who is imagined, written, and thus defined above all else by his resistance to definition" ("Peter Pan: Indefinition Defined," *Lion and the Unicorn* 36, no. 3 [2012]: 274-87).

While Peter is certainly Barrie's most well-known betwixt-and-between, however, the eternal boy is certainly not the only character that exposes the narrative's preoccupation with unconventional temporality and histories, although the overwhelming critical focus on him would seem to suggest as much. The representation of one particularly forgettable character, Liza—the Darlings' only servant, and a grown woman who is described in the 1928 published play as "so small that when she says she will never see ten again one can scarcely believe her"— personifies a type of incongruous physical compression and constant transformation that is often overshadowed by Peter's more prominent ephemerality. [12] Nevertheless—or perhaps as a direct result of her position at the very fringe of the *Peter Pan* narrative's complex history—she plays a strangely pivotal metamorphic role throughout the evolution of Barrie's work, particularly in his dramatic versions.

To begin with: the most evident of Liza's traits are her unusual physique and age, which together highlight what the author viewed to be the close connection between indeterminate individual development, on the one hand, and the incongruous scale of visual theater, on the other hand. In contrast to Mr. Darling and Captain Hook, who are both fully grown in spite of their occasional lapses into childishness, and in contrast to clearly designated child characters such as the Lost Boys, Liza is the only figure in the play whose approximate age remains deliberately ambiguous. Early on in the drama, for instance, Mrs. Darling implores her husband not to speak so loudly or "the servants will hear [him]," at which point the stage directions add with parenthetical humor: "*There is only one maid, absurdly small too, but they have got into the way of calling her the servants.*"[13] In a household that is already constrained by limited financial

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[12] Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, 103.

[13] Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, 96.

resources, Liza's position of classed inferiority is exaggerated by Barrie's description: the Darlings' attempts to assign Liza an incompatible title of plurality actually amplifies the latter's "absurd" smallness, further marginalizing her from a largely middle-class narrative. Despite this tension, the author is quick to affirm her unique singularity as well. "There is only one maid," the stage directions assure the reader, revealing the ways in which the author imagines Liza—a visually compressed individual who is neither fully adult nor child—to occupy simultaneously a position of contractedness and proliferation. In a moment of self-reflexive anticipation, this early scene suggests that Liza's compact size generates a peculiar type of multiplicity, making her both one of the smallest and most unexpectedly pervasive figures in Barrie's play.

Figure 2.1. Ela Q. May, the original Liza in *Peter Pan* (1904).[14]

This idea is concretized by Barrie's casting for the original role of Liza, who (in the 1904

Christmas season performances of *Peter Pan*) was played by Ela Q. May, a child actress whose

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[14] Bruce Hanson, *Peter Pan on Stage and Screen, 1904-2010*, 2nd ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 47.

youth visibly shone on stage.[15] According to Kirsten Stirling, this female actor was the youngest

of the assembled cast, even though the role that May played—that of an authoritative woman

servant who dominates the Darling household in her employers' absence at the beginning of the

play—was a deliberate mismatch to her small stature.[16] Even so, this type of physical incongruity

would not have been entirely unfamiliar to the audience: it amplified the notable actor-character

discrepancies that appeared in other figures on Barrie's stage as well, including Peter himself

(traditionally played by a grown woman), Mr. Darling/Hook (often played by the same actor),

and the Darling children's canine nanny, Nana (played by a man in a St. Bernard costume).

Yet Liza's visuality remains unique for the lack of explanation that it has garnered from

scholars, who have found plausible reasons for many of the other characters' incompatible actors

but remain mainly puzzled about, or silent concerning, Liza's oddly enigmatic function in

Barrie's drama.[17] Nor is this bewilderment in itself surprising: although the author never omitted

her from the play as he did with other scenes and characters, the published 1928 edition

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[15] Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, 103.

[16] Kirsten Stirling, *Peter Pan's Shadows in the Literary Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 39.

[17] In the case that they make for classifying *Peter Pan* as a pantomime, for instance, Donna R. White and Anita Tarr have remarked on the scholarly interest in emerging legislation that regulated child labor and performance: "The favorite theory is that Barrie was working around a British law that made it illegal to have children under fourteen on stage after 9:00 at night. Casting a grown woman as Peter meant that the other children's roles could be scaled according to her height rather than a boy's, allowing older children to play younger parts…However, the most logical reason for the cross-gendered casting is that the male lead of a pantomime was always played by a woman" (*J.M. Barrie's "Peter Pan" In and Out of Time: A Children's Classic at 100* [Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006], xiii). White and Tarr apply the same generic standard to explain the fact that Nana, a female dog, is generally played by a man in a furry costume. The most commonly accepted interpretation for why Mr. Darling and Hook are typically played by the same actor, on the other hand, can easily be traced back to the original actor, Gerald Du Maurier, who expressed his interest to Barrie in performing both roles. Barrie, always open to the feedback of his cast, agreed and shaped the part accordingly.

attributes only nine lines in total to her, marking her as one of the play's most negligible figures. The answer to this paradox seems to resonate in part with Nina Auerbach's observation that Victorian stage children "were charmed and particular vehicles of transformation; in themselves and in their social class, they might become anything."[18] Certainly, Barrie would have found the idea of a mutable child-as-adult an appealing one, especially since May's youthful presence counterbalanced the sheer number of adult actors in Barrie's drama that played child roles (primarily in compliance with emerging legislation that regulated the times during which child actors could work). Barrie himself hints at another possible reason, though, for his remarkable commitment to this character when his stage directions introduce Liza as an individual who will "never see ten again." Specifically, this remark anticipates another comment that he would make in his preface to the 1928 play, on the ways in which individuals come to change and grow:

> Some say that we are different people at different periods of our lives, changing not through effort of will, which is a brave affair, but in the easy course of nature every ten years or so. I suppose this theory might explain my present trouble, but I don't hold with it; I think one remains the same person throughout, merely passing, as it were, in these lapses of time from one room to another, but all in the same house.[19]

The process of growing up, Barrie implies here, is not necessarily a chronological and stadial phenomenon. Rather, it is an ongoing process that—metaphorically, at least—fosters a sense of continuity and singularity for the individual that experiences this growth. More important, this constant fluidity grants the individual access not only to the particular stage of life that she currently inhabits, but also to her entire history—past, present, future, and across different

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[18] Nina Auerbach, *Ellen Terry: Player in Her Time* (London: Dent, 1987), 33.

[19] Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, 78.

geographies.

It is perhaps fitting, then, that Liza the betwixt-and-between is the only character that can actually move "from one room to another…all in the same house"—for, again unlike other adults in the play, she is also the only grownup to cross into Neverland from London and back again without ever interrupting the continuity of the two worlds. At the end of Act Two in the published play, for example, Liza makes an unexpected appearance in Neverland after the motherless Lost Boys (under Peter's leadership) have built a "lovely, darling house" for Wendy, their new "mother":

> WENDY. Very well then, I will do my best. (*In their glee* [the Lost Boys] *go dancing obstreperously round the little house, and she sees she must be firm with them as well as kind.)* Come inside at once, you naughty children, I am sure your feet are damp. And before I put you to bed I have just time to finish the story of Cinderella.
>
> (*They all troop into the enchanting house, whose not least remarkable feature is that it holds them. A vision of* LIZA *passes, not perhaps because she has any right to be there; but she has so few pleasures and is so young that we just let her have a peep at the little house…*)[20]

Liza's unprecedented intrusion in this scene is startling, and rightly so: here, the stage directions reveal that her ability to navigate an indeterminate developmental space—one that is neither fully adult nor fully childlike—also allows her to transcend conventional narrative and spatial boundedness. Her experience of Barrie's fantasy world spans Neverland and London in one lithe stroke—and notably here, she is not only small in stature (as the stage directions describe her in Act One) but also specifically described as being "so young," with "so few pleasures"—

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[20] Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, 116.

generating a sense of both spatial and temporal singularity that no other character in the narrative embodies. (Peter, the other notable betwixt-and-between in the play, expresses such scathing disdain for Victorian England and its emphasis on growing up that he cannot be said to have a real connection with London, even though he can clearly leave Neverland to visit it.) In other words, Liza's bizarrely in-between status earns her a degree of omnipresence that no other character—not even Peter—in Barrie's work of fantasy can boast.

While Liza is a privileged onlooker, however, she nonetheless remains an estranged and essentially marginalized outsider as well. In this scene, it is interesting to note that she is allowed only "a peep at the little house" in Neverland before she passes on again, excluded once more from a narrative in which she seemingly longs to participate. This fleeting appearance is strangely reminiscent of Peter's own disembodiment: after Wendy and the rest of the boys troop indoors, and after Liza's shadowy figure has peeped inside, Peter reemerges from the little house to stand guard but soon falls asleep. Act II concludes with the following, purely descriptive set of stage directions: "*Dots of light come and go. They are inquisitive fairies having a look at the house. Any other child in their way they would mischief, but they just tweak Peter's nose and pass on. Fairies, you see, can touch him.*"[21] The juxtaposition here of Liza's brief appearance, on the one hand, and the revelation that fairies can touch Peter, on the other hand, emphasizes the two characters' shared statuses as betwixt-as-betweens: for a brief moment, their roles seem almost reversed as Liza floats away like a passing specter and Peter's impenetrable ephemerality is shattered for an instant by the fairies' exceptional ability to prove that he is tangible. Even more striking is the overlapping description between Liza and the fairies, both of whom "pass" through the scene with no witnesses but the observing audience. The tiny servant, however,

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[21] Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, 116-17.

remains exceptional even here: while the fairies are imagined as elusive creatures within the realm of Barrie's fantasy world, Liza's curiosity is palpable to the last, tied to her tangible interest in the "little house" and the peculiarly scaled storytelling inhabitants within. For while Peter returns to the window of the Darlings' London home in order to listen to Mrs. Darling's stories to her children, Liza's presence seems to be drawn in by a much more unlikely—and incompatible—figure of storytelling: the juvenile and pretend mother, Wendy, who (like the small servant) is physically unsuited to the maternal role that she plays to the Lost Boys on the fantasy island. Liza, in other words, is a figure that is intricately tied to elements within Barrie's narrative that—like herself—occupy incongruous scales, just as the enchanted little darling house's "not least remarkable feature is that it holds them" in spite of its tiny size. As I suggest in the analysis that follows, Barrie viewed these qualities of incompatibility and mutability as integral to the act of authorship, especially in a play with a history as dynamic as *Peter Pan*'s.

Harlequin's Wand: Liza as Author(izer) of Metanarrative Transformation

What begins to emerge at this critical moment in the play is the sense that Liza represents a new kind of experiment in literary scales and narrative creation. In many ways, her adaptable presence helps draw into focus Barrie's attempt to parse the parallels between an indeterminate developmental experience like Liza's (one that is continuous and all-encompassing, "all in the same house" rather than based on a system of diametrically opposed stages) and the broad metamorphic history of a narrative such as *Peter Pan*. As a character that is so closely tied to the art of transformation and storytelling—and particularly as an individual who never quite seems to fit the narrative in which Barrie attempts to contain her—Liza is therefore best positioned to

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illuminate the metanarrative that the author himself perceived to be unfolding as he continued to revise and reimagine the scope of his *Peter Pan* legend. For the direct product of the young maid's spatial mobility appears to be her unusual omnipresence: not only within each individual iteration of Barrie's narrative, but spanning the entire creational and revisionary history of his narrative as well.

The first indications of Barrie's peculiar interest in the figure of Liza appear in the program that was distributed on the opening night of his fantasy drama: in it, he lists not himself but rather Liza as "the author of the play." Green observes that in the inaugural performance, May (as Liza) even opened the play "by coming before the curtain and stamping her foot at the orchestra," thus demonstrating her ability to frame the narrative with her directorial force.[22] Although Green, Stirling, Tarr, and White have all noted May's strangely attributed authorship in the play's premiere in London, however, the young actress' appearance as the ostensible "author of the play" was not an isolated occurrence. In fact, Barrie continued to list May as an author on his programs until 1906, during which interval she reprised her role as Liza at the Duke of York's Theatre.

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[22] Green, *50 Years of Peter Pan*, 82.

Figure 2.2. The original 27 December 1904 programme for *Peter Pan*, which lists Liza (played by Miss ELA Q. MAY) as "Author of the Play."[23]

Figure 2.3. The programme that Barrie had specially made and printed for Michael Llewelyn Davies, for a one-time abridged performance in Michael's nursery on 20 February 1906. J.M. Barrie called this his "favourite programme of the play." Notably, this version attributes authorship to both J.M. Barrie and Ela Q. May, and the latter is listed as playing Wendy rather than Liza.[24]

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[24] Hanson, *Peter Pan on Stage and Screen*, 88.

In an adapted one-time performance of *Peter Pan*, for instance—performed to a

bedridden Michael Llewelyn Davies in his nursery on 20 February 1906—the specially designed

program's title page announces the play as "Scenes from *Peter Pan*, by J.M. Barrie and Ela Q.

May." It is interesting to note that while the latter is also listed last on the register of cast

members in this program, as usual, its presentation insists on highlighting her difference from the

rest of the cast in a way that even the official London programs did not.[25] Whereas the names of

the other actors on the playbill are each separated by a capitalized "AND," Ela Q. May's place at

the bottom of the program is preceded instead by a single negatory word: "BUT." This

differential conjunction, which estranges May formally from the rest of the cast, further

accentuates the already uneasy position between author and player that the young actress

occupied in Barrie's emerging metanarrative about the creation of *Peter Pan*. (Barrie's own

name appears only once more in the program's title pages, on the recto in miniscule font: "The

Management have the honour to announce that J.M. BARRIE will be the Cabman." Underneath, the

announcement continues: "Stupendous attraction of Ela Q. May, who will perform in her own

play.") It is as if the once understated joke about May's possible authorship of the play (which

appeared as a sort of footnote in the 1904-05 London programs) took its full form only in the

privacy of Michael's nursery, revealing itself to be a much more potent and preoccupying

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[25] It is also worth noting here that May's name appears not next to the title of Liza—who
was played instead by Alice Robinson in this particular performance—but rather next to that of
"Wendy Moira Angela Darling," whom May (according to Hanson) would play subsequently
during the cast's 1906-07 tour. Furthermore, according to Hanson's detailed cast listings, Alice
Robinson would later go on to play Tiger Lily in the 1909-10 touring production of *Peter Pan*
(*Peter Pan on Stage and Screen* 48, 336). In fact, the entire assignment of parts during this
special performance, as Hollindale observes in his introduction to *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, is
unusual when compared to the listings of the production proper: Winifred Geoghegan, who
played Peter in Michael's version, normally played Curly at the Duke of York's Theatre during
the 1905-06 season, while Phyllis Beadon (who played the role of Second Twin in London
during the same season) played Mrs. Darling in "*Peter Pan* in Michael's Nursery"
("Introduction," in Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, 311).

paradox for Barrie than it would otherwise appear to be to the public eye. Considering the author's penchant for amusing inside jokes about his own lack of involvement in writing *Peter Pan*, then, it comes as little surprise that he also once declared this puzzling playbill his "favourite programme of the play."[26]

Of course, it is a well-known fact that Barrie treated the issues of authorship and ownership of *Peter Pan* with perfect irony on more than one occasion. As he once declared wryly in his preface to the 1928 published play: "Some disquieting confessions must be made in printing at last the play of *Peter Pan;* among them this, that I have no recollection of having written it. Of that, however, anon."[27] The author's prefatory confession recalls the distant beginnings of his drama nearly twenty-four years after it had first been performed in London: *Anon: A Play*, after all, was the working title that Barrie had used while he drafted his initial manuscript of *Peter Pan* in 1903. For someone as preoccupied as Barrie was with the fluid histories that shape narratives over time, the idea of a work that would continue to change and expand throughout his career but also refer constantly to its own nebulous origins fascinated him. This fascination manifests itself most clearly in his collaboration with the young Llewelyn Davies boys, whose adventure-centered games Barrie recorded and memorialized in a photograph-style story titled *The Boy Castaways* (1901) and eventually inspired Barrie to write *Peter Pan*.[28] As Marah Gubar observes: "While Barrie's decision to pretend that various young

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[26] "Note on Peter Pan in Michael's Nursery," JMBarrie.co.uk, http://www.jmbarrie.co.uk/view/665/ (accessed 17 May 2017).

[27] Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, 75.

[28] *The Boy Castaways* was a book inspired by Barrie's games and adventures with the Llewelyn Davies boys during the summer of 1901. The author printed two copies for the family—one that was famously "lost" by the boys' father and the other that currently resides at the Beinecke Library at Yale University. As Andrew Birkin observes, the book contains thirty-

people authored his own work is certainly fraudulent, it is not necessarily insincere…It was partly motivated by a desire to acknowledge that his work was inspired by interaction with actual children and a creative genre (private theatricals) that did in fact allow young people to function as authors and actors."[29] If the playwright humorously conceived of childlike Liza as the appropriate author of his play in 1904, then, perhaps it is in part because her ability to embody a position that straddles both child and adult identities also mirrors some of the tremendous collaborative transformations that the play would undergo over the years. These revisions, which Barrie often made with the feedback of his actors and audience alike, involved questions of which dramatic genres would appeal to the diverse groups of theatergoers—including children, grownups, critics, and repeat guests—that attended his performances of *Peter Pan*.

One of the most significant of these changes concerned the traditions of harlequin and pantomime, which played a large role in Barrie's original conception of the play but faded in later iterations. In his study of the Victorian pantomime tradition, Jim Davis details the connection between—as well as the narrative structures of—pantomime and the Harlequinade, many of which Barrie himself invokes in early versions of *Peter Pan*. "At the beginning of the Victorian period," Davis explains, "pantomime was dominated by the Harlequinade, which featured the characters of Clown, Pantaloon, Harlequin and Columbine. The Harlequinade was preceded by an Opening, often based on legend, classical myth, nursery tales, literary classics

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five photographs with typeset captions describing the brothers' various adventures that summer (*J.M. Barrie and the Lost Boys: The Real Story behind Peter Pan* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003], 87). The full title of this collection is "The boy castaways of Black Lake Island, being a record of the terrible adventures of the brothers Davies in the Summer of 1901, faithfully set forth by Peter Llewelyn Davies," and many of its themes concerning pirates and shipwrecks eventually found their way into *Peter Pan*.

[29] Marah Gubar, "Peter Pan as Children's Theatre: The Issue of Audience," in *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature*, ed. Julia L. Mickenburg and Lynne Vallone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 484.

and sometimes entirely original in content, in the course of which several of the principal characters, usually wearing what were known as 'big heads', were transformed into the Harlequinade characters."[30] Many of the roles in *Peter Pan*'s opening night performance—the clown, Columbine, Pantaloon, and so forth—would have been familiar tropes to Barrie's audience, especially since the pantomime had become a staple of nineteenth-century Christmastime theatrical tradition.

White and Tarr, as well as Green, have observed that an early manuscript of *Peter Pan* ends with a short Harlequinade set in Kensington Gardens, with Peter dressed as a clown and Wendy as a columbine (both familiar figures in traditional pantomimes); the stage directions describe one scene as "turf under trees, and it is covered with clowns, pantaloons, columbines and harlequins, very gay and animated and all engaged in a dance in character.[31] This scene, however, as White, Tarr, and Stirling have all noted, was quickly replaced by the somewhat magical reappearance of Liza in the actual 1904 production: "By the first performance of *Peter Pan*…this scene had been scrapped, reduced to a minor transformation scene at the end which is initiated by the maid Liza walking across the stage with a 'Harlequin's wand,' thus allowing the curtain to rise on the final 'tree-tops scene.'"[32] This final scene, though extensive, is worth quoting at length here because it provides important additional context about Liza's crucial role in these early productions. Her appearance as a Harlequin figure takes place after Wendy—who has been returning to Peter's house in Neverland every year to do the spring cleaning—returns

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[30] Jim Davis, ed., *Victorian Pantomime: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1.

[31] Green, *Fifty Years of Peter Pan*, 63; White and Tarr, *In and Out of Time*, xviii.

[32] Stirling, *Peter Pan's Shadows in the Literary Imagination*, 32; White and Tarr, *J.M. Barrie's* Peter Pan *In and Out of Time*, xvi.

home and says goodbye to Peter:

(Wendy runs into house)

(Peter exits R)

(Music cue No.56)

(Liza enters from L., with Harlequin Wand. Crosses to C. Shows wand to
audience, taps door, and exits L. dancing to Music)

(Segue Music)

SCENE V…

...The Scene changes to the Tree Tops. The tops of a great wood of firs are seen,
the idea being that we look down on the wood from on high. Beyond is a great blue sky.
Not seen at present, are nests which are really fairy houses, to be lit up presently inside
by connection with unseen electric wires…LIGHTS appear in house, doors open. LIZA
comes out, wire is fixed. WENDY stands L. of door. PETER sits R. of door.)

LIZA: Well, goodnight, Miss Wendy.

WENDY: (At door) Tell mother the spring cleaning is getting on very nicely. You
really do like the house?

LIZA: Of course, it's small, Miss Wendy.

WENDY: It is small. Peter, don't bite your nails. But, you see, it isn't as if we
meant to entertain.

LIZA: Quite so, Miss.

(Getting on broom, ready to fly)

WENDY: And it's rather noisy in the evening. You see, those nests are the
fairies' houses and they light up at bath time, and fairy children are so naughty in their

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baths that the row they make is positively deafening.

WARNING FOR CURTAIN. DITTO FOR CHIMNEY SMOKE TO DOLL'S HOUSE

LIZA: One can't have everything.

WENDY: That's just what they say. Most people of our size wouldn't have a house at all. Good-night.

LIZA: Good-night, Miss. Home!

(Amid hand waving, she flies away on broom and disappears L.)[33]

Liza's connection here with Harlequin is extraordinarily revealing: these generic ties allow her to internalize the origins and narrative development of Barrie's play, so that even when the author later eliminated overt references to the dramatic genre that in many ways first inspired *Peter Pan*, he was able to retain its traces by channeling them through the figure of Liza. As Green observes: "In [appearing with the wand] she is replacing Harlequin, who was actually still appearing for a few performances, and represents the only remaining trace of the conventions from which Barrie finally broke away so completely in *Peter Pan*."[34] More so than her fleeting and mystical passage through Neverland in the 1928 published play, her magical ability to travel between London and the fantasy island on a flying broomstick demarcates her as a symbol of transcendent spatiotemporal and narrative fluidity. In other words, the young maid acts for Barrie as a metafictional time capsule of sorts: she embodies those origins and genres of the author's play that he needed to eliminate from his narrative but also refused to relinquish entirely, and transferred instead into the visual compactness embodied by the Darlings' tiny maid.

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[33] Hanson, *Peter Pan on Stage and Screen*, 46.

[34] Green, *Fifty Years of Peter Pan*, 82.

The mystery of Liza's smallness, therefore, is much more than a question of developmental liminality, though this element is certainly her most striking attribute. Rather, her indeterminate character represents a type of miniaturized metanarrative that allowed the author to preserve fragments of its past even as it forged ahead into a new and revisionary future. Perhaps this is why Wendy, in the treetops scene, emphasizes—and subsequently dismisses—the issue of conventional size with such insistence: "Most people of our size wouldn't have houses at all," Wendy remarks, while the rest of their conversation revolves around Liza's observation that the house is very "small." As the embodiment of several incompatible sizes and temporalities, the tiny but omnipresent Liza becomes for Barrie a microcosm of *Peter Pan*'s generic histories; as wielder of Harlequin's wand, she is also an enactor of the play's future generic transformations, thus opening up new kinds of narrative possibilities as easily as she changes the final scene's setting with a wave of her wand. In short, Liza is a force of both local renewal and global endurance, an individual who challenges the author to generate new narratives that are always in touch with their origins but that also must continue to expand in order to contain her ever-shifting identity.

For Liza's refusal to be contained or narrated by the very narrative that Barrie has created under her name is one of the trademarks of her paradoxical existence, which—as the preceding analysis has demonstrated—lies at both the periphery and center of *Peter Pan*'s history. This quality of strange, compressed boundlessness is perhaps most clearly expressed in the history of the well-known (and soon excised) Beautiful Mothers scene, which featured a series of London mothers who undergo tests set by Wendy in order to determine whether they will make suitable

adoptive mothers for the Lost Boys.[35] Within the first season of the play's performance, this

scene was abandoned for its impracticality and exaggerated sentimentality. The only remnant of

it that remained in later revisions is performed by Liza alone, who adopts a boy named Slightly

after the rest of the Lost Boys have already been taken in by the Darling family:

> *There is a moment's trouble about* SLIGHTLY, *who somehow gets shut out.*
>
> *Fortunately* LIZA *finds him.*
>
> LIZA. What is the matter, boy?
>
> SLIGHTLY. They have all got a mother except me.
>
> LIZA *(starting back).* Is your name Slightly?
>
> SLIGHTLY. Yes'm.
>
> LIZA. Then I am your mother.
>
> SLIGHTLY. How do you know?
>
> LIZA *(the good-natured creature).* I feel it in my bones.[36]

The implication here is that Liza is not only Slightly's adoptive mother—she may also very well

be Slightly's real mother, for she pronounces his name with the instantaneity of true maternal

instinct. Her recognition, moreover, mirrors a comic mention made by Slightly himself in

Neverland about the mother that he does not really remember: "SLIGHTLY *(as usual).* My

mother was fonder of me than your mothers were of you. *(Uproar.)* Oh yes, she was. Peter had to

make up names for you, but my mother had wrote my name on the pinafore I was lost in.

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[35] Hollindale describes "the notorious 'Beautiful Mothers' scene, in which a group of London mothers claim possession of the lost boys and undergo sundry tests of maternal feeling. The scene was acutely embarrassing and was abandoned early in the play's first season" ("Introduction," in *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, xiii).

[36] Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, 151.

'Slightly Soiled'; that's my name."[37] Slightly's story about his own naming is in some ways an unwittingly devastating one: the joke is that he, like dirty laundry, has been rejected and thrown out from the household. By affirming her son's humorous mistake and calling him by the name that he has fashioned for himself in order to express her love, however, Liza retroactively aligns herself with his origin story. On the one hand, if she is the same mother who penned the words "Slightly Soiled" on his pinafore, then the ostensible act of naming/writing that she commits before the narrative begins has made a tangible impact on the rest of the story (Put differently: Slightly, the other characters in the play, and even the stage directions all recognize him by the name that Liza has ostensibly inscribed for him.) On the other hand, her ability to influence retroactively the events of the narrative through her affirmation—"Is your name Slightly? …Then I am your mother"—suggests that she is an authorizer of existing narratives such as Slightly's as well.

This dual role—as both author and authorizer of stories—brings us to perhaps one of Barrie's most curious but poignant commentaries about the relationship between authorship and transformation in his lifelong masterpiece. By creating a character such as Liza and endowing her with original status as "author of the play," Barrie suggests that to be an author is in some ways to occupy the wrong scale entirely: Liza, after all, is a woman, mother, maid; she is of the working rather than a leisured middle class; she is small, childlike but undeniably adult-like as well. She is timeless because she is neither here nor there, but even so seemingly everywhere at once; and she is overwhelmingly marginalized in every iteration of the play, creating her stories from somewhere behind the scenes but appearing in a flash every once in a while to reveal the magic and fantasy according to which she operates, before vanishing again with the wave of a

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[37] Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, 107.

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wand. She is a figure who must gradually disappear—much as Barrie does—from the very work that she has come to author, in part because the distance between creator and story allows the latter to continue growing in ways that it could not achieve under sole authorship. And above all, Liza is the player that refuses to be narrated by Barrie: even now, her own fantastic origins, betwixt-and-between as they are, defy history, thus allowing her to become both timeless and timely in a way that none of Barrie's other characters really seem to have achieved in *Peter Pan*'s lengthy evolution.

In this sense, Liza might very well be the type of "author of the play" that Barrie half-humorously, half-earnestly envisioned in the 1904 program. As Max Beerbohm famously declared in his review of the play:

> Mr. Barrie has never grown up. He is still a child, absolutely. But some fairy once waved a wand over him, and changed him from a dear little boy into a dear little girl. Some critics have wondered why among the characters in *Peter Pan* appeared a dear little girl, named in the programme "Liza (the Author of the play)". Now they know. Mr. Barrie was just 'playing at symbolists.'"[38]

This sense of metamorphosis, recorded by one of the play's privileged original audience members, finally captures Liza for a clear but fleeting moment in the very stage spotlight from which she would soon disappear. In this moment, Beerbohm acknowledges her role as a stand-in for Barrie the author, rather than a mere afterthought: a character whose ultimate prerogative is her ability to transcend the traditional boundaries of the narrative and divert some of the weight that the playwright felt in claiming sole authorship to a play as complex and collaborative as

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[38] Max Beerbohm, "The Child Barrie," *Saturday Review*, 7 January 1905, 13-14. (It remains unclear whom Beerbohm cites when he makes a reference to Barrie "playing at symbolists." Here, Beerbohm also makes a joking reference to Barrie's notoriously small stature when he remarks that the author "has never grown up.")

Peter Pan. And perhaps it is true, to an extent, that Barrie's most striking act of authorship transferral occurs through an ironic transformation of his own, from the childish literary spirit of Barrie himself into an incongruous, irritable but heartwarming character such as Liza. If this young servant is well-positioned to be author because she is compression and expansiveness embodied—neither child nor adult, but something in between—she also reminds us that she can influence the events of Barrie's drama in ways that redefine traditional spatial, narrative, and authorial boundaries entirely.

In this regard, Liza draws into focus a phenomenon that becomes increasingly intricate once we shift our attention to other areas within the history of the Peter Pan stories. Whereas Liza exemplifies a very particular representation of authorial transformation in Barrie's stage productions, his works of fictional prose—specifically, his two novels that also include the Peter Pan myth—offer a much more nuanced glimpse into his conception of the connection between authors and narrative theories. The first novel I examine in the following section—*The Little White Bird*—precedes the dramatic *Peter Pan* but is also concerned with the issues of authorship and storytelling that become concretized through Liza. Barrie's prose, which is more accessible than his dramatic versions of the Peter Pan legend, lends itself to an even more detailed study of the ways in which both written and oral stories about the past are authored throughout the history of this evolving work. The second novel in this analysis—*Peter and Wendy*—likewise capitalizes on the descriptiveness of prose but offers a slightly different perspective on Barrie's interest in the creation of stories. It is notable, for example, that Liza forsakes her function as a motherly and authorial figure entirely in *Peter and Wendy*; instead, the narrative flattens her into a bad-tempered misanthrope with few redeeming qualities and even fewer appearances than in the dramatic versions. Meanwhile, her retreat into the background of Barrie's 1911 narrative

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enables other figures of storytelling—particularly the novel's unnamed narrator—to emerge with startling force, creating a sense of expansiveness and preoccupation with future narratives that the play versions could not quite achieve. In short, once we turn away from the visual metanarrative of Barrie's dramatic *Peter Pan* and toward the prose of Barrie's novels, we begin to see the evolution of his Peter Pan myth in the context of a different set of relationships: specifically, the interconnectedness of storytelling, temporal scales, and certain written narrative histories.

2. Lost Origins and Unnarrated Futures: The Temporal Scales
of Barrie's *The Little White Bird* and *Peter and Wendy*

Barrie's fascination with recording stories about origins and narrative temporalities through his prose was one that began early in his literary career.[39] As an avid consumer of Scottish folklore, Barrie had always been intrigued by the ability of narratives to recalibrate literary and temporal scales: the author, who was born in Kirriemuir (a small town in Angus, Scotland) spent his early years as a writer exploring the distant histories of places that he frequented regularly throughout his childhood. *Auld Licht Idylls* (1888), for example—the novel that first established Barrie's budding reputation as a writer—consisted of a series of sketches about his local roots and hometown, a whimsical place that he affectionately rename "Thrums" in his fictionalized version. ("Thrum" was the sound that he remembered his father, a professional weaver, making on his loom.) The author's impressive ability to capture rural

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[39] The second novel, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, excerpts and reprints the chapters from *The Little White Bird* that deal with Peter Pan's story in single-volume format, and is addressed here only through the earlier source material.

Scottish life and history through prose would later prompt one contemporaneous reviewer to quote British prime minister William Ewart Gladstone, who praised Barrie's third Thrums novel, *The Little Minister* (1891), for its authenticity: "I find the new work to need no passport," Gladstone once reflected. "I am glad that old Scotland produces sons who can so well portray her."[40]

Preoccupied by new retellings of the "old Scotland" myths and tales that he had heard growing up, Barrie soon learned to transform his broad historical curiosity with the past into something of a literary obsession that persisted throughout his numerous rewritings of the Peter Pan legend. Both *The Little White Bird* and *Peter and Wendy* address the difficulty of narrative beginnings: specifically, the significance of origin stories that either change through intergenerational retellings or lose their origins completely as they are reimagined through different timelines and storytellers. *The Little White Bird*, for instance, is best known as the first novel to introduce Peter Pan and in many ways attempts to address its own status as an inaugural story, in which characters can trace certain types of narrative beginnings through fantastic spatial changes or constant retellings. Tales of the past pervade the entire novel, from a story about the birth of a young boy named David to the adventures of Peter Pan's earliest days as an infant-bird in Kensington Gardens. In this work, which was unlike anything Barrie had written up until that point, the author imagines a world in which past narratives inform present knowledge in a largely linear fashion, and in which the recounting of origin stories is a collaborative act that can be attributed to a very specific set of storytellers.

By contrast, by the time Barrie published *Peter and Wendy* in 1911 Peter Pan had become something of a myth in his own right: the character's own origins quickly faded in the popular

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[40] "Brief and Critical Comment," in *Current Literature* (New York: Current Literature Publishing, 1892), 9:153.

imagination as *The Little White Bird* and *Peter in Kensington Gardens* became overshadowed by

Barrie's celebrated stage play, *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up.* It was this gradual

movement away from the beginnings of Peter Pan that the author captures most keenly in *Peter*

and Wendy, and (contrary to the critical commonplace that the novel is more structurally and

thematically laborious than the original play) it is that movement that that makes this work such

an integral milestone in the evolution of Barrie's Peter Pan myth. Unlike its predecessor, this

later novel implies that events are always in the process of being recorded but are never quite

inaugurated—that, in other words, the attempt to discover one's origins often begins not at the

beginning, as one might expect, but rather in *media res* or through a range of future narratives

that have yet to be narrated. To convey this idea, Barrie turned to the formal possibilities offered

by the novel's structure: just as the stage was best suited for visually representing the major

generic and authorial shifts that occur in the dramatic *Peter Pan*, *Peter and Wendy* explores the

problem of beginnings using an ambiguously positioned narrator and multiple narrational

temporalities. In doing so, Barrie emphasizes the fluidity of not only the Peter Pan legend's

written histories, but also the ways in which stories about the past and future are the products of

any number of storytellers (rather than the domain of specific narrators, authors, or timelines).

Although James R. Kincaid once dismissed *Peter and Wendy* as an "unauthentic" book version

of the dramatic source material, I therefore propose that Barrie's novel was actually integral to

concretizing the author's expanding vision of his Peter Pan myth and its lost origins.[41] The story

of *Peter and Wendy*, in short, is a story of proliferation: it is a novel that embraces the opening of

countless new narratives and possibilities by rewriting constantly both narrative pasts and

futures. Together, *The Little White Bird* and *Peter and Wendy* form a core part of Barrie's

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[41] James Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 286.

literary canon that reveals the extent to which the author conceived of his *Peter Pan* novels as forming their own inaccessible history, one as ambiguous and dynamic as the character of Peter Pan himself.

"To Begin with the Goat": Accessing Narrative Origins in The Little White Bird

Although the history and origins of *Peter Pan* are themselves difficult to parse, the first published appearance of its eponymous protagonist can be traced to five short chapters in Barrie's *The Little White Bird*, a fantasy-fiction novel set in early twentieth-century London. Studied by scholars in large part for its Peter Pan subnarrative, this work has rarely garnered such close attention for some of its other equally compelling features, especially its unusual formal structure and fantastic treatment of the relationships among time, movement, and storytelling. The story's premise, which has become unfamiliar to most readers, is worth recounting here briefly. This partly fantastic narrative is told from the perspective of Captain W——, a bachelor and retired military man whose otherwise pedestrian life in London is punctuated by his frequent (and extremely ambivalent) encounters with a beautiful young woman named Mary A—— and her six-year-old son, David.[42] Although throughout the first half of the novel the narrator treats Mary publicly with scorn—he refuses to speak to her at all and seems to take vindictive, silent pleasure in her misery—he also befriends David, and the pair's subsequent adventures near Kensington Gardens become a main focus of Barrie's whimsical narrative. Indeed, scholars now remember the character of Captain W—— perhaps most vividly for his striking fascination with the young boy rather than for his strained (but significant) anti-

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[42] This latter name, of course, is a none-too-oblique reference to Barrie's wife, Mary Ansell.

relationship with Mary: Eyal Amiran, for instance, goes so far as to observe that this early work expresses a "knowing and suggestive fascination with perverse sexuality, including the sexuality of children."[43] While Amiran's remark reinforces the now-familiar speculation concerning Barrie's personal intimacy with the Llewelyn Davies boys, these observations distract from two important thematic issues surrounding *The Little White Bird*'s central characters that I examine in detail below: the narrator's particular interest in David's beginnings, which of course involve David's mother, and the characters' shared fascination with narratives that involve revisiting the past.

The clearest example of the narrator's recurring interest in origin stories occurs (appropriately) at the beginning of *The Little White Bird*, when Captain W—— introduces David to the reader for the first time. After describing his fondness for David's youthful artlessness, as well as the peculiar thrill of joy that the narrator feels whenever the boy absentmindedly addresses him as "father" (though he is not the boy's real father), the captain recalls a time when he offered to tell David what he knows about the young boy's beginnings. "One day, when David was about five," he explains, "I sent him the following letter: 'Dear David: If you really want to know how it began, will you come and have a chop with me to-day at the club?'"[44] This invitation not only designates the captain immediately as a bearer of stories about beginnings, though he reprises this crucial role throughout *The Little White Bird*; it also positions him as a master of many different storytelling techniques, from novel-writing and the epistolary form to oral storytelling. As the scene leading up to David's origin story continues to unfold, this narratorial eclecticism appears to grant him the unusual—even fantastic—flexibility to navigate

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[43] Eyal Amiran, "The Shadow of the Object in *Peter Pan*," *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 38, no. 3-4 (2012): 162.

[44] Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 10

at will different intranarrative temporalities in order to access the past. In the next paragraph, for instance, he takes David on a journey back in time with only a few simple instructions to a hailed London cabdriver: "Drive back six years," he tells the driver, as if journeying in years rather than miles is a standard affair, "and stop at the Junior Old Fogies' Club."[45] Here, space and time converge, creating an oddly scaled paradigm in which narrative past and spatial movement inhabit the same plane of motion—in other words, this moment reveals that narrative beginnings in this novel are not only easy to access but also accessible through multiple dimensions.[46] Even so, it is important to note that motion—whether temporal or spatial—still operates according to a linear logic, so that a trip into the past and the backwards motion required to reach the past are directly correlated.

This idea of narrative linearity, however, becomes more problematic when the narrator demonstrates that his ability to travel into the past through geographical movement is not a universal trait (as one might expect in a work of fantasy-fiction) but rather an exclusionary one. In the scene that follows, Captain W—— reveals that he is not actually telling David the story of the boy's beginnings—to David's dismay—but rather the story of how David's parents came to be married. In the very first memory that he shows David, for example, the narrator forgets about

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[45] Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 11.

[46] If past histories can be accessed in *The Little White Bird* through a simple cab ride, this moment suggests, then other types of temporal shifts may be directly correlated to motion as well, as when the narrator later describes—in terms of spatial movement—the rapidity with which David grows up from an infant to a young boy of three. "On Tuesday [David] climbed the stone stair of the Gold King," the narrator observes, "and on Wednesday he struck three and went into knickerbockers. For the Kensington Gardens, you must know, are full of short cuts, familiar to all who play there; and the shortest leads from the baby in long clothes to the little boy of three riding on the fence. It is called the Mother's Tragedy" (108). Barrie's notion here that an individual's progressions through time and space can amount to the same result—some form of growth or tangible change—establishes a motif that would also play a central role in *Peter and Wendy*, in which the Darling children's flight from London to a faraway fantasy island promises them eternal youth.

the young boy's presence altogether and becomes entirely immersed in his past observations of the couple's early interactions from afar. "As I sat there watching that old play," the narrator reflects, calling attention to the performative nature of this narrative from the past, "David plucked my sleeve to ask what I was looking at so deedily; and when I told him he ran eagerly to the window, but he reached it just too late to see the lady who was to become his mother."[47] Temporality is tied once again to spatiality here: David's physical separation from the scene before him—he must run "eagerly to the window" to see his mother's younger self, but even then to no avail—makes it unclear for whose benefit Captain W—— tells the story of "how it began" in the first place. After all, the captain's dual position as both past onlooker and present narrator seems to grant him the unique ability to negotiate different narrative temporalities and spaces with ease, while the character whose origins are being told—those of David himself— remains at the periphery, unable to see or move into his own past at all.

If Barrie appears to suggest here that the adult narrator is more authoritative than his child counterpart in the art of storytelling and temporal movement, however, the passages that follow quickly illustrate David's ability to offer a distinct perspective on stories about the past as well—a perspective, moreover, that is accessible only to David by virtue of his youthfulness. The narration for the next scene thus begins: "David knows that all children in our part of London were once birds in the Kensington Gardens; and that the reason there are bars on nursery windows and a tall fender by the fire is because very little people sometimes forget that they have no longer wings, and try to fly away through the window or up the chimney."[48] A new type of myth is being made here in the tradition of folklore; as Jason Marc Harris observes, Victorian

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[47] Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 20-21.

[48] Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 21.

book-length fantasies such as Barrie's "grew from the narrative assumptions of the folk fairy tale: the reality underpinning the events of the tale is not questioned."[49] And although the narrator partakes in this folkloric creation by foregrounding his fantastic knowledge that "all children…were once birds," he also admits that he has since relinquished his role as an authoritative storyteller of children's own origins. "[David] used to enjoy being told of this," Captain W—— writes, "having forgotten all about it, and gradually it all came back to him, with a number of other incidents that had escaped my memory…He never tires of this story, but I notice that it is now he who tells it to me rather than I to him."[50] The adult narrator may play a central role in the production of myths, but it is David who over time learns to recover them once more and expand them into stories that connect the past with the present. In this scene, for example, the young boy's awareness that all children began as birds directly explains the current need for barred nursery windows in London, suggesting that myths and origin stories in *The Little White Bird* serve a teleological purpose by offering a better understanding of the present moment. The interplay between two different storytellers here, Barrie implies, actually elucidates rather than obscures the world in which the characters live—a world that is filled with fantastic elements and seeming contradictions, but whose peculiarities can always be traced back to some tangible sort of beginning.

Barrie illustrates this idea perhaps even more clearly in *The Little White Bird* with his introduction of Peter Pan, whose fairytale-like story focuses on his early days as a part-bird, part-baby in Kensington Gardens. In the opening lines of the first Peter Pan chapter, Captain W—— introduces Peter through a layered series of perspectives, creating a story that has been filtered

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[49] Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008)*,* 61.

[50] Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 23.

through at least three generations of storytellers apart from the narrator himself:

> If you ask your mother whether she knew about Peter Pan when she was a little girl she will say, "Why, of course, I did, child," and if you ask her whether he rode on a goat in those days she will say, "What a foolish question to ask; certainly he did." Then if you ask your grandmother whether she knew about Peter Pan when she was a girl, she also says, "Why, of course, I did, child," but if you ask her whether he rode on a goat in those days, she says she never heard of his having a goat. Perhaps she has forgotten, just as she sometimes forgets your name and calls you Mildred, which is your mother's name. Still, she could hardly forget such an important thing as the goat. Therefore there was no goat when your grandmother was a little girl. This shows that, in telling the story of Peter Pan, to begin with the goat (as most people do) is as silly as to put on your jacket before your vest.[51]

At first, Peter's introduction appears to be permeated by a sense of its own mythic timelessness: the description calls attention to the narrative's enduring nature, which is subsequently confirmed through three generations of orally transmitted testimony. In her examination of certain temporalities in children's stories, Maria Nikolajeva defines this representation of mythic time in literature as "Kairos, [which] presupposes that death is always followed by resurrection."[52] (By contrast, she explains that sequential time, or what the Greeks called Chronos, "has a beginning and an end, and recognizes every event in history as unique."[53]) But despite the mythic qualities of Peter's introduction here, the narrator reveals that the telling

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[51] Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 131.

[52] Maria Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* (London: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 5-6.

[53] Nikolajeva, *From Mythic to Linear*, 6.

of Peter's story must be timely as well, for it is characterized by intergenerational differences in which the tales of grandmother, mother, and child all change in minor details with each new iteration. The eponymous protagonist's various manifestations in these versions—as a boy riding a goat, a boy without a goat, and so forth—surprisingly suggest that he is not immune to the transformative effects of linear time and others' evolving viewpoints at all, despite his clear desire to remain so. As Captain W—— observes with a hint of wryness when addressing the paradox of Peter's temporality: "Of course…Peter is ever so old, but he is really always the same age, so that does not matter in the least."[54] According to the whimsical rules that govern time in Barrie's fantasy world, the young character himself may never age within the parameters of his story, but his superfictional narrative will never cease to grow and evolve because its narrators and audiences must continue to change as time progresses. In other words, Peter Pan occupies positions of both intradiegetic timelessness and extradiegetic timeliness; and while his story, as Stirling observes, "seems to be something one remembers rather than something one creates," the narrator also makes it clear here that Peter's literary evolution can still be traced along generational lines, so that the changes made at each stage of the storytelling process advance in a linear fashion and remain readily identifiable.[55]

It is striking, then—particularly to those for whom the Peter Pan subnarrative is *The Little White Bird*'s most memorable legacy—that the novel's most poignant portrayal of the ways stories can evolve has nothing to do with either Peter Pan's story or the idea of intergenerational literary changes. Rather, this portrayal involves an individual whose role has since been largely forgotten by most readers, and whose history at the periphery of *The Little White Bird* in many

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[54] Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 131-32.

[55] Stirling, *Peter Pan's Shadows in the Literary Imagination*, 14.

ways resembles that of Liza in the dramatic *Peter Pan*. This character, Irene, is the youthful

daughter of a waiter with whom Captain W—— is acquainted. Although she is unconscionably

young for the job, Irene also acts as both nurse and storyteller to the infant David, and the

captain—filled with a mixture of jealousy and condescending admiration toward her privileged

position of intimacy with the baby boy—remarks that he had "never known a bolder little hussy

than this Irene" (though he does concede that "this little mother" is beloved by the children of

Kensington Gardens).[56] Unlike Liza or Wendy, however, both of whom act as "little mothers" to

other characters, Irene does not author or authorize narratives of her own; instead, she tells only

one familiar story—the story of Cinderella—with such heartfelt earnestness that Captain W——

cannot help but begrudgingly admit her privileged access to the histories and world of fairytales:

> As you shall see, I invented many stories for David, practising the telling of them
>
> by my fireside as if they were conjuring feats, while Irene knew only one, but she told it
>
> as never has any other fairy-tale been told in my hearing. It was the prettiest of them all,
>
> and was recited by the heroine.
>
> "Why were the king and queen not at home?" David would ask her breathlessly.
>
> "I suppose," said Irene, thinking it out, "they was away buying the victuals."
>
> She always told the story gazing into vacancy, so that David thought it was really
>
> happening somewhere up the Broad Walk, and when she came to its great moments her
>
> little bosom heaved. Never shall I forget the concentrated scorn with which the prince
>
> said to the sisters, "Neither of you ain't the one what wore the glass slipper."[57]

The Cockney inflections that characterize Irene's telling of "Cinderella" distinguish her

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[56] Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 77, 116.

[57] Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 116-17.

immediately from any other narrator in the novel, distancing her from the formal writtenness of Captain W——'s narrative and positioning her firmly in the realm of oral performativity. As this scene quickly makes clear, her rendering of "Cinderella" resonates with the captain not only for its content but also for its timeless authenticity: her informal speech patterns ("neither of you ain't the one what wore the glass slipper"), coupled with her complete immersion in the story no matter how many times she tells it ("thinking it out," "she always told the story gazing into vacancy"), makes her version of Cinderella both endlessly repeatable and iteratively unique. Far from needing to perfect her storytelling technique by practicing her story "as if [it] was a conjuring feat," as Captain W—— does, Irene is so deeply engrossed by the magic and distant histories in which she participates through retelling that she becomes a key player in (rather than a merely disinterested narrator of) the story: she is, as Captain W—— appropriately observes, "the heroine" of the tale. In contrast to the narrator's introduction of Peter Pan, a story that changes slightly with each passing generation of tellers, Irene's tale therefore represents an alternative form of storytelling that remains fundamentally connected to its original form and—by extension—to traditions of literary magic more broadly.

Nowhere is Irene's connection with these traditions more pronounced than in the narrator's description of her as "the tawdriest little Arab of about ten years."[58] The term "Arab," which was used throughout the nineteenth century to refer to individuals (particularly children) who lived in impoverished circumstances or on the streets, evokes two different but equally significant historical associations. On the one hand, the term positions her as a heavily Orientalized figure, one whose choice of literary material—a fairytale—aligns her with stories of faraway origins. By the time of Barrie's writing, for instance, speculations concerning the

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[58] Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 68-69.

Eastern roots of fairytales and their evolution into their modern Western forms had gained immense popularity. (The French author Charles Perrault, of course, as well as German academics Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, had all published their own versions of "Cinderella" in the seventeenth- and nineteenth-centuries, respectively.) In an 1877 article titled "Origin of Cinderella," an anonymous writer observes that the story's inclusion of elements such as glass slippers and transformative pumpkins "makes it probable that this story came from the East. *Chindee* is Hindoo word for ragged clothing, and *Ella* is a not uncommon woman's name in India."[59] As Max Lüthi reflects in his study of these tales, scholars and collectors alike were fascinated by their shared view that fairytales represented some sort of "remnants of ancient myths, playful descendants of an ancient intuitive vision of life and the world."[60] For Barrie as for these authors, the origins of fairytales offered a point of entry into a much vaster and more distant past, one that was connected seamlessly to the present but still retained an air of otherworldly mysticism that could never be fully dispelled.[61] The fact that the author locates the nexus of immersive storytelling in a figure such as Irene suggests that to occupy a position of historical and geographical incongruity, as she does, is to immerse oneself in the rich histories of lore that might remain inaccessible to other, more conventional figures of storytelling.

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[59] "Origin of Cinderella," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* 4, no. 4 (1877): 506.

[60] Max Lüthi, *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*, (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1970), 23.

[61] As Allison B. Kavey observes, Barrie was fascinated by the power of fairytales and folklore. Elements of mythological inquiry in Barrie's *Peter Pan* canon include not only the obvious allusions to Pan, the Greek god of nature and rustic music. It also employs familiar folkloric tropes such as the changeling plot, in which magical beings steal human children and bring them back to their own world to live. ("'I do believe in fairies, I do, I do': The History and Epistemology of Peter Pan," in *Second Star to the Right: Peter Pan in the Popular Imagination*, ed. Allison B. Kavey and Lester D. Friedman [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009], 92.)

On the other hand, the narrator's description of Irene as an Arab reveals another unexpected aspect of her oddly scaled position within Captain W——'s narrative. As Irene's father reveals to the narrator, the family lives "off Drury Lane," an area of London infamous for its slums and street-dwellers throughout the nineteenth century.[62] Irene's most memorable characteristics, after all, are her "gutta-percha tooth" (a symbol of her inability to afford a substantive, more expensive tooth replacement) and her incongruous status as "a little mother" to the children of Kensington Gardens, which seems to imply that she has grown up well before her time. If Irene's metaphorical Orientalization appears to distance her geographically from twentieth-century England, her position as a servant girl likewise transforms her into a child of early- and mid-nineteenth-century London, a site of destitution and hard hours for the countless children who worked in order to help support their families. (It was not until 1870 that the first Elementary Education Act—also known as Forster's Education Act—allowed local authorities to regulate children's access to education across England and Wales, and only another decade later that schooling became mandatory for all children under the age of ten.[63]) Rather, ten-year-old Irene's impoverished circumstances force her to work as a nurse to the children of well-to-do families: her mother, the narrator reveals, is bedridden with a deadly illness but too poor to afford proper medical care, while her father is employed as a respectable but clearly overworked and undercompensated waiter. As a consequence, Irene presumably spends much of her time in

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[62] In his book on social reform, *In Darkest England and the Way out* (1890), Salvation Army founder William Booth records the dreary condition of a couple living in the Drury Lane slums: "Husband and wife, drunkards; husband very lazy, only worked when starved into it. We found both of them out of work, home furnitureless, in debt. She got saved, and our lasses prayed for him to get work. He did so, and went to it. He fell out again a few weeks after, and beat his wife…" ([London: International Headquarters of the Salvation Army, 1890], 167.)

[63] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 148.

the streets of Drury Lane, the London neighborhood that social researcher Henry Mayhew once described as "a wretched place, which was full of children of all ages," many of them employed as street-sellers.[64]

The connection between Irene's orientalization and lower-class status in the slums of London is striking here: as Saree Makdisi points out, the city had become (by the late eighteenth century) "a space inhabited by colonial otherness," making London "simultaneously the center of empire and a condensed or miniature version of the entire space (of empire) of which it is the center."[65] Irene's small stature and youth recall this quality of paradoxical urban compression and expansion; that the narrator refers to Irene as an "Arab" is therefore a double play on her incongruent class and otherness. In this critical moment, it is almost as if the narrator attempts to negate the enchanting and somewhat threatening power of her liminal storytelling by exoticizing her entirely. But it is also this position of liminality and worldliness that produces Irene's unique style of narration, which is filled with such vivid personal experience and empathy for Cinderella that even Captain W—— cannot help quoting her closing lines for the reader at length with admiration:

> "She sits down like," said Irene, trembling in second-sight, "and she tries on the glass slipper, and it fits her to a T, and then the prince, he cries in a ringing voice, 'This here is my true love, Cinderella, what now I makes my lawful wedded wife.'"
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> Then she would come out of her dream, and look round at the grandees of the Gardens with an extraordinary elation. "Her, as was only a kitchen drudge," she would

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[64] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the Poor* (London: Griffin, Bohn and Company, 1861), 469.

[65] Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 36.

say in a strange soft voice and with shining eyes, "but was true and faithful in word and deed, such was her reward."

I am sure that had the fairy godmother appeared just then and touched Irene with her wand, David would have been interested rather than astonished. As for myself, I believe I have surprised this little girl's secret. She knows there are no fairy godmothers nowadays, but she hopes that if she is always true and faithful she may some day turn into a lady in word and deed, like the mistress whom she adores.

It is a dead secret, a Drury Lane child's romance; but what an amount of heavy artillery will be brought to bear against it in this sad London of ours. Not much chance for her, I suppose.

Good luck to you, Irene. [66]

Although Captain W—— dismisses Irene's conclusion as nothing more than "a Drury Lane child's romance," it is precisely her status as a child of the Drury Lane slums that allows her to hold two sets of contradictory beliefs at once: brutal knowledge of the present world, on the one hand ("she knows there are no fairy godmothers nowadays"), and an enduring faith in the possibility of fairies and other magical beings, on the other hand. Fairies, after all, appear in Barrie's fantasy version of twentieth-century London but are associated most strongly with the type of enduring, expansive past that Irene embodies: as Katharine Briggs observes, "the flourishing time of fairy belief must be pushed back to the earliest historic times…almost to the verge of pre-history," with the earliest recorded references to fairies in England occurring in

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[66] Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 117.

Anglo-Saxon literature.[67] It is this quality of faith- rather than fact-based revival—coupled not with Irene's belief in fairy godmothers, but rather with her persistent hope in the type of magical renaissance that they symbolize—that lends Irene's storytelling abilities a lasting charm unrivaled even by the joint stories of Captain W—— and David. In other words, if the young street Arab girl appears to inhabit twentieth-century London anachronistically, it is her otherworldly difference and incompatibility with the present world that allows her such remarkable access to these narratives of the past. And—as would be the case with Liza only a few years later—perhaps there is a hint of magic even here: for the potentially transformative touch of the fairy godmother's wand positions *The Little White Bird* not only as a novel that is preoccupied by the past and its own faraway origins, but also as a work that must learn to anticipate its own future evolutions as well. It comes as little surprise, then, that Barrie revisits the story of Cinderella in an iconic scene of storytelling in *Peter and Wendy*, a novel that is preoccupied by the narrative possibilities that proliferate once we move beyond lost stories of the past and into the more expansive realm of competing narrative futures.

"It is a Dull Beginning": Rewriting Narrative Histories and Futures in Peter and Wendy

The author's fascination with the creation of histories and beginnings in *The Little White Bird* assumes a much more ambivalent form in *Peter and Wendy*, a novel that—to modern-day readers at least—has become the most familiar iteration of Barrie's Peter Pan legend. It is worth reiterating that by the time that the novel was published in 1911, Peter Pan as a figure had become something of a myth: his own origins had become dispersed within in the popular

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[67] Katharine Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (London: Routledge, 1967), 4.

imagination (*The Little White Bird* had been overshadowed by the vast popularity of the stage play), and Barrie was highly conscious of this extratextual transformation as he began composing *Peter and Wendy.* This self-awareness may have prompted one of the narrator's most metafictional remarks in a scene halfway through the novel, after the Darling children join the Lost Boys in Neverland: "Even Slightly tried to tell a story that night," the narrator observes with a hint of ironic humor, "but the beginning was so fearfully dull that it appalled even himself, and he said gloomily: 'Yes, it is a dull beginning. I say, let us pretend that it is the end.'"[68]

In many ways, this novel is haunted by its inability to return to its own beginnings, and seems to resign itself to telling a narrative that can never fully locate the past (as the characters in *The Little White Bird* do so easily) or the origins of a character with as elusive a history as Peter Pan. As Yeoman observes of the author's early reluctance to compose *Peter and Wendy* at all: "No wonder [Barrie] resisted requests to write the novel for so many years… In the theater, [Peter Pan] makes his sudden appearances and disappearances, and may never be exactly the same from year to year. It is, perhaps…the irreducible quality of Peter Pan's own mythic resonance, that refuses easy containment in print and genre."[69] It is reasonable to assume that Barrie—with his keen sense of the many competing representations of Peter Pan that existed in the popular imagination—found it difficult to validate any particular authorized version of his own *Peter Pan* story over the countless others that had been created over a few short years, much less trace the Peter Pan myth back to its increasingly nebulous beginnings.

Rather than shying away from such a monumental task, however, the author embraced the problem of creating a text that would revel in its own inherent mutability while maintaining a

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[68] J.M. Barrie, *Annotated Peter Pan*, 122.

[69] Yeoman, *Now or Neverland*, 82.

sense of formal fixedness, and there is a liberating quality that accompanies the loss of origins in this novel that is not present in *The Little White Bird*. The story of Cinderella that appears in *Peter and Wendy*, for instance, draws attention to a mode of storytelling in which beginnings and endings can be easily compressed. In this early scene, Wendy wakes up to discover Peter crying on the floor of the Darling nursery, and—curious rather than frightened by his presence—is taken aback to learn that neither Peter nor the inhabitants of Neverland know how to tell stories of their own:

> "Do you know," Peter asked, "why swallows build in the eaves of houses? It is to listen to the stories. O Wendy, your mother was telling you such a lovely story."
>
> "Which story was it?"
>
> "About the prince who couldn't find the lady who wore the glass slipper."
>
> "Peter," said Wendy excitedly, "that was Cinderella, and he found her, and they lived happily ever after."[70]

In contrast to the genuine outburst of feeling with which Irene tells her version of the tale, Wendy's truncated recitation here is purely functional: her single-sentence synopsis of the story spans across beginning ("that was Cinderella), development ("and he found her"), and end ("and they lived happily ever after") with a terseness that demystifies the fairytale form completely, reducing what might once have been a magical narrative full of rich histories into a formulaic series of linear events. (As Slightly would put it, Wendy's story has both a "dull beginning" *and* a dull end.) Here, the charm of telling familiar stories has devolved into something repetitive rather than rejuvenating: fairytales, for all of the wonder and mystery that they potentially represent, have instead become a mass-produced product that requires constant re-imagination—

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[70] Barrie, *Annotated Peter Pan*, 45.

not unlike, of course, Barrie's own experience with continuously rewriting his own Peter Pan myth.[71]

Not that all episodes that deal with fairytales in the novel are portrayed negatively: later in the novel, Wendy's role as storyteller simply highlights instead the instability of different narrational temporalities, as well as the arbitrary conventions that determine how we come to interpret tales in the first place. In this scene, after she and the Lost Boys have settled in for the night in their underground Neverland home, she begins a story about the parents that she left behind in faraway London:

> "Listen, then," said Wendy, settling down to her story, with Michael at her feet and seven boys in the bed. "There was once a gentleman—"
>
> "I had rather he had been a lady," Curly said.
>
> "I wish he had been a white rat," said Nibs.
>
> "Quiet," their mother admonished them. "There was a lady also, and—"
>
> "Oh, mummy," cried the first twin, "you mean that there is a lady also, don't you? She is not dead, is she?"
>
> "Oh, no."
>
> "I am awfully glad she isn't dead," said Tootles. "Are you glad, John?"[72]

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[71] As Jack Zipes points out, the "institutionalization" of the fairy tale occurred during the eighteenth century, creating a template through which audiences "came to expect and demand certain kinds of structures, topoi, motifs, and characters in fairy tales as they formed a literary institution." Although Irene's telling of "Cinderella" resists this type of institutionalization, Wendy's does not, suggesting that Barrie's conception of the potential of storytelling had shifted significantly between the publications of *The Little White Bird* and *Peter and Wendy*, respectively (*Happily Ever after: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry* [New York: Routledge, 1997], 4).

[72] Barrie, *Annotated Peter Pan*, 123.

As Maria Tatar notes, the twin's naïve observation in this scene—"She is not dead, is she?"—

emphasizes the ambiguity of narrative temporalities in a place such as Neverland, where there

has never been a need for understanding formal storytelling conventions simply because

storytelling has presumably never existed before the arrival of Wendy. Tatar reinforces this idea

when she notes that the first twin's question, "naïve as it may seem, makes an important point

about storytelling and narration. Narrative depends on the idea of the past made present, and it

uses the past tense ('There once was…') to evoke what feels like a present moment. Hence the

sentence 'There was a lady also' does *not* imply that the lady is (now) dead"—though of course,

the twins' unfamiliarity with the conventions of storytelling makes them oblivious to this

distinction."[73] Unlike the Darling household, Neverland is a space that is characterized by the

ambiguity of narrative time—a space, moreover, in which different temporalities are constantly

confused or exchanged for one another, making any single authoritative version of narrative

events extremely difficult to pinpoint.

It is this sense of inherent temporal fluidity, as well as the author's own experiences with the

Peter Pan's countless evolutions between 1902 and 1911, that ultimately frames Barrie's

decision to abandon structured narrative teleology throughout *Peter and Wendy* in favor of a

more inchoate, unpredictable form of narration than he had ever used before in his writing.[74] The

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[73] Barrie, *The Annotated Peter Pan*, 123.

[74] Peter's own "story" about how fairies were created, told to Wendy shortly after they first meet, is also an anti-narrative of sorts about the danger of dullness in telling teleological origin stories. The narrator observes: "Wendy had lived such a home life that to know fairies struck her as quite delightful. She poured out questions about them, to his surprise, for they were rather a nuisance to him, getting in his way and so on, and indeed he sometimes had to give them a hiding. Still, he liked them on the whole, and he told her about the beginning of fairies. 'You see, Wendy, when the first baby laughed for the first time, its laugh broke into a thousand pieces, and they all went skipping about, and that was the beginning of fairies.'" Although Peter deigns to recount this story to Wendy, its anticlimactic, repetitive conclusion ("and that was the

apparently static or tautological Neverland portrayed in the novelized version of *Peter Pan*, for instance, is fraught specifically with the competing influences of its own narrated historical past, narrative present, and to-be-narrated future. One understated but notable example of this unconventional approach to recording narrative history occurs during Peter's encounter with a Never bird, who appears after a particularly nasty battle between the Lost Boys and Captain Hook's pirate crew. During the skirmish, Peter is unfairly wounded by Hook and left to die on a rock that will soon be submerged by rising lagoon waters. At the critical moment before Peter's impending death, however, a Never bird appears and gives the protagonist her nest in which to sit, thus allowing the young boy to escape the rock and avoid drowning.

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beginning of fairies") reinforces the idea that stories—at least unimaginative ones—about beginnings and linear progress have no place in *Peter and Wendy* (Barrie, *Annotated Peter Pan*, 42).
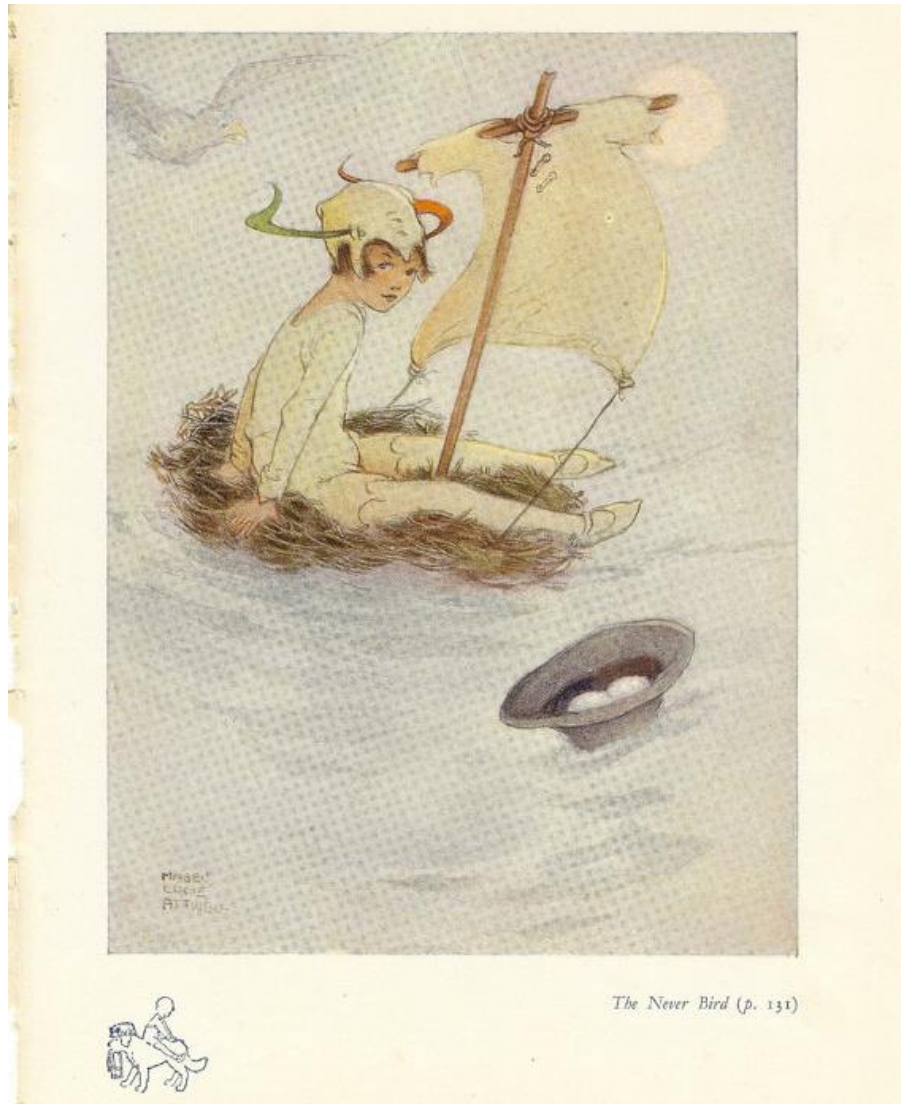
Figure 2.4. Peter in the Never bird's nest; her eggs safely nestled in a broad-brimmed hat.[75]

In return for her rescue, Peter places the bird's eggs safely in one of the pirate's abandoned hats, which prompts the following observation from the narrator: "As we shall not see her again, it may be worth mentioning here that all Never birds now build in that shape of nest, with a broad brim on which the youngsters take an airing."[76] In a single sentence, the narrator neatly blends

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[75] Mabel Lucie Attwell, *Peter Pan and Wendy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921).

[76] Barrie, *Annotated Peter Pan*, 113.

three ostensibly distinct timelines—foreknowledge of the unnarrated future ("as we shall not see her again"), narrative present ("it may be worth mentioning *here*"), and narrational present ("all Never birds *now*")—into a singular plane of temporality, creating a sense of simultaneous compactness and excess within the scene. If Neverland is a place that is characterized by circularity of movement (as in the looping procession of Lost Boys, redskins, and pirates that marches around the island while Peter is away) as well as by an uncanny juxtaposition of stasis and progression (as in the case of Peter and Hook, respectively), it is also one that manipulates the narrative present in order to produce proliferating past and future narratives of its own.

For as this passage and similar ones throughout the novel reveal, Barrie's fantasy island is far from the timeless idyll that scholars have overwhelmingly interpreted it as embodying; it is, rather, a space that invites the possibility of multiple linear temporalities—and by extension, competing narratives about the creation of recorded history as well. Barrie best illustrates this point during one of the novel's most climactic episodes, in which the Darling children and Lost Boys prepare to leave Neverland forever and fly back to London. In his introduction to the scene, the first-person narrator—a largely invisible figure whose snide, often ambivalent commentary about events in the story has made him one of the most memorable aspects of Barrie's novel—highlights his own role as a recorder of narrative histories:

> We have now reached the evening that was to be known among them as the Night of Nights, because of its adventures and their upshot. The day, as if quietly gathering its forces, had been almost uneventful, and now the redskins in their blankets were at their posts above, while, below, the children were having their evening meal; all except Peter, who had gone out to get the time. The way you got the time on the island was to find the

crocodile, and then stay near him till the clock struck.[77]

Unlike the mainly positive representations of time in *The Little White Bird*, Peter's pretense of going to "get the time" in this scene is both performative and useless; there is no real purpose to reintroducing either linear or mechanized time into the world of Neverland, which operates according to its own whimsical laws of temporal progression. In order to underscore this contrast, the narrator proposes an alternative type of temporality through his odd grammatical framing of the scene, introducing a night that "was to be known among them as the Night of Nights." Here, the narrator's use of the simple past tense ("was") is offset abruptly by the copula ("to be"): together, the two tenses create the future anterior, which grammatically anticipates a future result of this narrative past tense. In other words, the decision to name that particular event "the Night of Nights" is a retrospective one that takes place at an unmentioned future point (presumably beyond the narrative we are reading, but still in that fantasy realm), while the passive construction of the sentence also obscures the author of such a decision (by *whose* action did this night come to be known as such?). Nikolajeva suggests that Barrie's fictional island is a "mythical land of immortality," in which "time is definitely circular, archaic" (as opposed to the "linear time" that characterizes the Darling household in England). Such a view, however, deemphasizes the importance of imaginative renewal in Barrie's work, for it is only through the constant creation (and recreation) of historical narratives that past, present, or future stories come to assume any type of significance. In other words, the more competing temporalities that emerge from a single event, the more possible iterations of history—and by extension, future narratives—about it can be recorded.

For even as the narrator documents this history of Wendy and the other children, he also

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[77] Barrie, *Annotated Peter Pan*, 116-17.

refuses to concede that it is the only version of events to be narrated. The phrase that he uses to designate "the Night of Nights" as a particularly significant event in the children's narrative, for example—"its adventures and their upshot"—is not unique at all but actually echoes an earlier moment in the novel, when the narrator starts to recount one of Peter's games but stops himself short with the following observation:

> The extraordinary upshot of this adventure was—but we have not decided yet that this is the adventure we are to narrate. Perhaps a better one would be the night attack by the redskins on the house under the ground, when several of them stuck in the hollow trees and had to be pulled out like corks. Or we might tell how Peter saved Tiger Lily's life in the Mermaids' Lagoon, and so made her his ally…
>
> Which of these adventures shall we choose? The best way will be to toss for it.
>
> I have tossed, and the lagoon has won. This almost makes one wish that the gulch or the cake or Tink's leaf had won. Of course I could do it again, and make it best out of three; however, perhaps fairest to stick to the lagoon.[78]

On the one hand, this moment is aleatoric in nature: it incorporates an element of chance into the process of literary creation, making it impossible to trace not only the origins of any particular story but also their future iterations (since the number of alternative narrative possibilities proliferate endlessly throughout the novel). In other words, by indulging the reader in this moment of performative indecision, the narrator illuminates the countless unexplored avenues that he has chosen to ignore by virtue of describing the story of the mermaids' lagoon. On the other hand, Barrie's narrator also highlights his own ambiguous investment in choosing one adventure over another. "Of course I could do it again, and make it best out of three," he remarks

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[78] Barrie, *Annotated Peter Pan*, 94.

casually, reminding the reader that perhaps he already has done so over and over again in any number of unnarrated versions of this narrative before committing this particular one to paper. As with Peter (who, according to the narrator, "often went out alone, and when he came back you were never absolutely certain whether he had had an adventure or not"), the majority of the children's adventures will remain inaccessible to the reader.[79] Even so, this moment suggests that literary randomness itself can fall within the realm of possibility and control. While certain stories must always be excluded, Barrie's narrator emphasizes the importance of understanding how these stories have come to be selected, even if their precise origins and future forms remain untraceable.

This type of infinite, non-predictive outward expansion thus acts as a positive motivating force throughout *Peter and Wendy* and is critical to understanding fully the author's expanding vision for the reception of his 1911 novel, specifically, as well as for the afterlives of his Peter Pan myth more generally. As the first published adaptation of *Peter Pan*, after all, this novel offers a uniquely interwoven metanarrative about the boundlessness of multiperspectival storytelling, and in many ways expresses Barrie's increasing awareness that the complex histories of his Peter Pan legend could never really be contained in a single, fixed text. (No more, at least, than they could be assigned to a single author—which explains in part why Liza gradually disappears as "Author of the Play" in later iterations and Barrie himself so strongly disclaims any right to sole authorship in his 1928 preface to the published dramatic *Peter Pan*.) As a result, although he did eventually agree to write and publish *Peter and Wendy*, I suggest that the novel he finally produced does not fix the work or attempt to contain in print format "the irreducible quality of Peter Pan's own mythic resonance," as Yeoman has proposed. On the

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[79] Barrie, *Annotated Peter Pan*, 92.

contrary: perhaps the most remarkable legacy of Barrie's novel lies in its pointed, paradoxical

refusal to remain static even in printed form, a fact that is supported by the prolific number of

adaptations that it has engendered since its initial publication over a century ago. In the decades

following Barrie's death, hundreds of iterations featuring some evolution of the character Peter

Pan have surfaced, with Disney's version of the young boy in the animated *Peter Pan* (1953)

having perhaps the greatest claim to fame in the modern popular imagination. Even throughout

Barrie's lifetime, however, and concurrent with the author's own attempts to continue

reimagining his original story, endless unauthorized editions and spinoffs appeared, much to the

bafflement of scholars such as Green. Green thus observes: "Very early in the play's history

Barrie allowed the illustrated *Peter Pan Keepsake* …[It] was re-issued for several years, with a

similar publication on a smaller scale called *The Peter Pan Picture Book*…While the *Keepsake*

and the *Picture Book*, mere souvenir programmes, are understandable, it is difficult to see why

Barrie allowed the other re-tellings, since he himself produced the definitive book, *Peter and

Wendy* in 1911."[80]

While the reasons for which Barrie allowed these retellings remain to this day unclear,

Peter and Wendy's representation of its own intranarrative possibilities certainly suggests that,

by 1911, the author had begun to imagine the Peter Pan legend itself as part of a much larger

collaborative sphere, one that is less concerned with locating a single source of authorship and

more interested in the potential of narratives that have yet to unfold. Put differently, Barrie's

novel offered both the author and his readers a new, innovative way of thinking about a text's

immortalized histories through constant growth and proliferation, rather than through futile

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[80] Green, *Fifty Years of Peter Pan*, 115. Keepsakes, or literary annuals that consisted of collections of illustrations, verse, and prose, were popular throughout the nineteenth century and were commonly exchanged as gifts.

attempts to locate the narrative's true beginnings or simply freeze it in time through publication. In this sense, the story of the eternally young boy Peter Pan is not a story about timelessness at all: rather, it is a prologue, an epilogue, and—like some of Barrie's most famous betwixt-and-between characters—a work that embraces (but is never beleaguered by) the burden of becoming something else. It is, in other words, a novel that challenges its own fixity as a written text and offers instead the bold possibility of achieving literary permanence through continuous change.

It is appropriate, then, that these ideas concerning the power of transformation have since fixed the author's name in the canon of English literature, making it both one of the most widely adapted and adaptable works of all time. For as this examination of his evolving narratives has demonstrated, the various versions that the author produced—from the dramatic *Peter Pan* to *The Little White Bird* and *Peter and Wendy*—reflect Barrie's ongoing preoccupation with the intrinsic incompleteness of stories, his own or otherwise. Whether he attributes authorship to an adult/child betwixt-and-between such as Liza or the skills of a genuine storyteller to a Drury Lane child such as Irene, Barrie is consistent in one respect: his conviction that narrative creation would forever remain the domain of those who are most incongruent with the stories that they tell. This incompatibility of stories and their storytellers, according to Barrie's vision, is critical to generating the sense of constant recalibration that could sustain a text far beyond its original context, propelling it instead into any number of undetermined future outcomes. It was also this quality of startling dynamism and expansion that would first draw the admiration of another notable aspiring English playwright during the first quarter of the twentieth century. This writer, A.A. Milne, would draw heavily from Barrie's representation of narrative theories as inspiration for his own works and express a similar preoccupation with the expansiveness of narratives, and in particular with the scales of literacy and written texts. Unlike Barrie, however, Milne

struggled throughout his lifetime to reconcile the unrelenting evolutions of the world and characters he had created, an idea that becomes clear when we turn to the functions of storytellers, words, and meaning-making in the Hundred Acre Wood.

Chapter 3

Making Meaning: Communities of Language, Learning, and

Democratic Philosophy in A.A. Milne's Pooh Stories

At first glance, there is something undeniably reassuring about the ways in which

language, literacy, and communities of meaning-making operate in A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-*

Pooh stories. The lack of explicit references to emerging scientific debates—as in the case of

Carroll's *Alice* stories—or complex characters with incongruent relationships to storytelling—as

with Barrie's *Peter Pan* stories—has traditionally offered Milne's narratives a coveted place

within the canon of children's literature, one that is most frequently associated with nostalgic

simplemindedness and childhood whimsy. These views have continued to persist, in part because

critical studies of Milne's Pooh stories overwhelmingly view both *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and

The House at Pooh Corner (1928) as escapist fantasies that eschew such gritty real-world topics

as contemporaneous intellectual philosophy and discourse. This outlook is equally true of the

two books of poetry that Milne published for children, *When We Were Very Young* (1924) and

Now We Are Six (1927). As St. John Adcock observed in his review of the first collection:

"Milne has been compared with Barrie, and though the style of each is distinctively individual

and they differ as much in method as in temperament, they have this much in common…Each

either keeps the memory of his own childhood wonderfully alive in him, or has a most subtle

insight into the simplicities and complexities of the child mind."[1] Milne, of course, was a close

correspondent of Barrie's throughout their lifetimes (the latter became something of an

inspiration for Milne's early attempts at playwriting), and it therefore comes as little surprise that

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[1] St John Adcock, "A.A. Milne," *Bookman* 411, no. 69 (1925): 145.

the two writers would be regarded by many readers as fellow geniuses in the creation of childishly spirited stories.

To overemphasize the childish mind in the works of Milne, however, as many scholars of the author's works continue to do, is to indulge in a type of misplaced nostalgia that limits the scope of what we actually find at the core of his writing for children. For Milne—like Carroll and Barrie—demonstrates that literary fantasy offers the unique ability to internalize and explore complex intellectual ideas in a way that often cannot be achieved through abstract theory alone. In this chapter, I argue that Milne's particular interest in contemporaneous philosophies of logic and language throughout the Pooh stories provides a much more fulfilling approach to understanding these works, which are deeply invested in the problems of meaning-making produced by communities of speakers such as those inhabited by his fictional characters. Once we understand the Pooh stories in the context of these debates (expressed by preeminent twentieth-century thinkers such as Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and John Dewey), what begins to emerge is a much clearer sense of Milne's intellectual project in testing the limits of existing linguistic and epistemological theories. Whether these ideas appear through a playful manipulation of proper names or the ineffectual communication of gloomy characters such as Eeyore, Milne emphasizes the importance of examining language in the context of its actual use, and especially when it is reappropriated by individuals in irreverent or unconventional ways.

In the first section of this chapter, I examine the philosophical manner in which Milne's poem "Teddy Bear," which appears to be aimed at a child audience, engages with and satirizes the linguistic theories of Russell, whose ideas concerning definite description and proper naming become humorously literalized within the framework of Milne's verse. This clear connection

between Milne and one of the most influential philosophers of language of his day has remained largely unexplored, and in turn offers a compelling framework in which to analyze Milne's subsequent writing for children. The next section thus focuses on Milne's representation of names and language in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, a collection of stories that is fascinated by the power of communities to create unusual meanings through shared systems of signification. In particular, my analysis suggests that these narratives expand the scale of existing linguistic debates in order to account for paradigms such as (mis)interpretation and collaborative meaning, which remained largely irrelevant to the specific brand of analytic philosophy advocated by Russell and his contemporaries. By incorporating these elements of variability and frequently amusing miscommunication into his stories, Milne intimates that language can become the domain of the everyman only if it is productively mediated through open, inclusive communities of free-thinking individuals. This important idea—about the relationship between the individual speaker and his broader community—becomes the focus of my third and final section, which examines the evolution of Milne's thoughts concerning democracy and education in his Pooh sequel, *The House at Pooh Corner*. In contrast to the more informal approach of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, this work critically reconsiders the formal systems and structures that will allow a community (such as that represented by his fantasy forest inhabitants) to achieve the level of openness and productive dialogue that he envisions in his first collection of Pooh stories. Through these constant recalibrations of philosophical thought, Milne demonstrates that adaptation and change—that is, a fundamental level of dynamism—is integral to his vision for collaborative meaning-making, which relies on the interplay between individuals and their communities in order to produce truly meaningful, mutually intelligible discourse.

1. "Don't You Know What 'Ther' Means?":

The Collaborative Scales of Language and (Mis)Reading in "Teddy Bear" and *Winnie-the-Pooh*

The first edition of *Winnie-the-Pooh* starts with a simple scene of reading. The verso opposite the title page contains two illustrations: the upper one depicts Christopher Robin taking a bath, while the second, smaller one below shows the boy's stuffed bear scratching his head, apparently puzzled by the words "BATH MAT" printed in reverse on the rug in front of him.[2] This second drawing—sketched by Ernest Shepard, the well-known illustrator of Milne's Pooh stories—has since been printed alongside the book's introduction by most publishers, but its framing function at the start of the original *Winnie-the-Pooh* draws attention to this work's familiar preoccupation with practices of reading, both visual and textual.

Scholars of Milne's writing have of course been quick to point out the abundance of nonsense language and amusing logical contradictions that characterizes the author's fantasy world, a place known to Milne's characters simply as "the forest."[3] Jackie Wullschläger, for instance, makes a fairly representative claim when she declares Milne to be "the greatest nonsense writer since Carroll and Lear" and asserts that the author brings the unique language and rhythm of nonsense "into the world of the everyday" through a domesticated universe of stuffed toys and childish carefreeness.[4] As I suggest in this chapter, however, the impulse that

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[2] A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, 1st ed. (London: Methuen, 1926).

[3] The popular use of "Hundred Acre Wood" as an all-encompassing name for Milne's world is due, undoubtedly, to Disney's adoption of the term in its film and television adaptations of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. In Milne's books, the Hundred Acre Wood actually refers to the specific neighborhood in which Owl's oak tree is situated, near the center of the forest.

[4] Jackie Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland: The Lives and Fantasies of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J.M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame and A.A. Milne* (London: Methuen, 1995), 189.

these stories exhibit toward unconventional modes of literacy and interpretation—from reading in the wrong directions to making up entirely new meanings for words—does not merely reflect the author's personal interest in the humorousness of nonsense, or even the childlike tendencies of his characters to misunderstand complex linguistic concepts. Rather, these recurring concerns position Milne—a preeminent early-twentieth-century essayist, poet, and playwright—at the center of several important contemporary epistemological debates: specifically, those concerning our knowledge of the world through formal analyses of linguistic expression.

Analytic philosophy, as this school of thought came to be known, was pioneered toward the end of the nineteenth century by the German logician Gottlob Frege and gained significant momentum in England under the new authority of philosophers such as Russell and Moore. Broadly speaking, this mode of thinking asserted that a complete account of our realities could be achieved only through close studies of language's logical forms, an idea that will be examined more comprehensively in the following section.[5] The current chapter investigates the ways in which *Winnie-the-Pooh* tests the usefulness of such linguistic theories by reimagining them in the context of the forest, whose inhabitants constantly try to define events and the world around them through formal acts of reading (or, more frequently, misreading). I argue that the apparent nonsense that often emerges as a result of these misreadings—whether through naming, verse, or logical tautologies—reveals the author's deeper preoccupation with the limitations of a purely formal understanding of language as proposed by Russell and his contemporaries. To this end, Milne's stories also interrogate what happens when language is used without regard for convention: that is, when it shifts away from the fixed grammatical and propositional structures of analytic philosophy toward a much more subjective, communal, and generative system of

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[5] Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytic Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 5.

linguistic meaning-making. By resituating Milne's fictional prose and verse for children in this critical context, I suggest that the author's treatments of language and simpleminded characters are memorable because they refuse to reduce knowledge of the world to its iterative parts, even (or perhaps especially) during a period of philosophical thought that consistently emphasized an objective, formulaic approach to epistemology. Instead, these works locate the nexus of meaning-making at the level of interpretation, thereby expanding philosophical discourse to include more imaginative ways of understanding our relationships to language and—by extension—to other individuals.

In the section that follows, I begin by offering an overview of early-twentieth-century theories concerning language, logic, and epistemology, as well as their specific responses to the more abstract branches of philosophy (most notably, the British idealist tradition) that preceded them. Of particular interest to Milne was the discussion surrounding definite descriptions (such as proper names) and the creation of phrases with no real-world referents (such as the apparently nonsensical phrase "The present-day King of France"). As I demonstrate, both of these examples take on new forms when adapted for the much more playful environments of Milne's fictional verse and prose, which experiment with the limits and possibilities offered by theories of logical positivism. In particular, I examine two of Milne's works in this capacity: "Teddy Bear" (a poem published in *Punch* in 1924 and later reprinted as part of his collection of children's verse, *When We Were Very Young*) and the first of his Pooh books, *Winnie-the-Pooh*. I suggest that both of these texts merge—to varying degrees—a genuine engagement with Russell's theories, on the one hand, and a desire to explore more unconventional avenues of meaning-making for which these rigid theories could not account fully, on the other hand. In this regard, Milne's narratives for children are far from reductive or merely whimsical; rather, they attempt to sort through

important intellectual questions concerning the scales of epistemology and narrative creation in early-twentieth-century thought. In doing so, they also accomplish through untraditional means—and arguably with more success—what the founders of analytic philosophy had first set out to do: to create a philosophy of language that would clarify rather than further complicate our understanding of the world, and to make this understanding truly accessible to (and inclusive of) all.
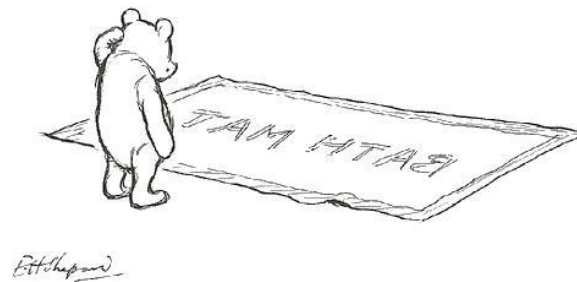
Figure 3.1. A scene of reading at the start of *Winnie-the-Pooh.*[6]

"King Louis So and So": The Logical Theory of Definite Description in "Teddy Bear"

Milne's familiarity with modern philosophical thought surrounding linguistics and logic is not entirely surprising. His career as an early writer and thinker was as impressive as it was diverse: after graduating from Cambridge, he began submitting short stories and essays to various London publications as a freelance writer until 1906, when Owen Seaman—editor of the satirical magazine *Punch*—hired the precocious twenty-four-year-old as an assistant editor. Milne remained active with the magazine until 1914, when he was deployed with the Royal

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[6] Milne, *The Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh, with Decorations by Ernest H. Shepard* (New York: Dutton, 1994).

Warwickshire Regiment to join the war effort on the front lines as a signalling officer.[7] Before

and during the war, Milne had dabbled variously in verse and (encouraged by Barrie himself,

whose work Milne admired) playwriting; soon after the war ended in 1918, he established his

name as the dramatist behind *Mr. Pim Passes By* (1919) and continued contributing pieces to a

variety of London publications such as *Outlook* and *Sphere*, all to considerable success.[8]

  This eclectic writing career afforded the young author numerous encounters with a wide

range of interdisciplinary studies, the most prominent of which included the works of Russell—

an established British logician, mathematician, and philosopher. Like Milne, Russell's writing

had been featured in some of the most prominent periodicals of the day (such as the

philosophical journal *Mind*) and would frequently appear printed alongside Milne's own writing.

(The March 1926 issue of *Harper's Magazine*, for instance, contains Milne's poem "In the

Dark," which is followed immediately by Russell's "Freedom in Society," an essay that

examines the role and desirability of freedom among individuals who live in communities.[9]) Nor

could Milne have been entirely unfamiliar with Russell's profound influence from the start: the

latter (who had graduated from Cambridge in 1893) returned to his alma mater on a fellowship

for his work on mathematics in 1895 and lectured at Trinity College on the philosophy of logic

in 1899, the year before Milne matriculated at the same college to pursue a degree in

mathematics as well.[10] This crossing of the two writers' paths is significant, for it establishes a

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[7] Milne, *Autobiography* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1939).

[8] Tori Haring-Smith, *A.A. Milne: A Critical Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1982).

[9] Milne, "In the Dark," *Harper's Magazine*, March 1926, 437; Bertrand Russell, "Freedom in Society," *Harper's Magazine*, March 1926, 438-44, http://harpers.org/archive/1926/03/ (accessed 17 May 2017).

[10] A.J. Ayer, *Bertrand Russell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 5-6.

largely unexamined connection between Milne and some of the most preeminent philosophical thinkers of his day, including Russell's colleague Moore—creator of the now famous Moore's paradox—as well as Wittgenstein, whose *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) studies the relationships among language, facts, and reality. These spheres of burgeoning interest within the Cambridge academic community would become central to Milne's construction of logic and language in both his verse for children and *Winnie-the-Pooh*, which often border on what one might call conventional nonsense but also reveal a deeper preoccupation with the theoretical implications of linguistic systems.

One tenet of early analytic philosophy—as the theories of Russell and his contemporaries came to be known—that bears particular relevance to Milne's writing is its emphasis on a knowable world. Russell, who was influenced by his own background as a mathematician and drew heavily from Frege's theories of quantifiable logic, adopted a metaphysical approach and asserted that the world consisted of many distinct concepts. Taken in relation to one another, these concepts formed propositions (or facts) about the world that individuals could grasp once they understood the constituent concepts involved in each proposition.[11] This view of philosophy signaled a critical departure from the influential tradition of British idealism, a school of thought that emphasized the subjective nature of all philosophical thought and denied the existence of mind-independent objects. Moreover, as Michael Beaney observes in his overview of the origins of analytic philosophy, Russell—in contrast to his colleague Moore, whose work relied primarily on conceptual analysis—focused specifically on the importance of analysis through formal logic. "This involved the identification, first, of the logical constituents of

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[11] Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 129.

propositions, that is, logical constants," Beaney explains, "but second, more importantly, of the logical propositions themselves, and in particular, of the fundamental propositions or logical principles from which all other logical propositions can be derived."[12] In other words, Russell suggested that our knowledge of the world could be disassembled into fundamental units of logic, which (as we shall see) in turn relied on a transparent understanding of language. Although the full breadth of Russell's contributions to twentieth-century philosophy is too wide-reaching to discuss at length, what is important to note here is the degree to which Milne's own mathematical background would later enable him to reconsider this view of a readily cognizable world through his own imaginative writing.

One aspect of Russell's theories in particular would have been accessible to Milne and proved proximate to the author's conceptualization of the peculiar logic and language systems that characterize the forest in *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Through his work at Cambridge, Russell became known for his theory of descriptions, which lays out a foundation for understanding (among other things) the functions of proper names. In his seminal essay "On Denoting" (1905), Russell establishes an influential formal method for analyzing "definite descriptions," or phrases (usually marked by the definite article "the") that purport to denote a unique object: for example, "The King of England."[13] According to this theory, any proposition containing the logical structure "The F is G" makes three interrelated claims, best summed up by Peter Hylton's outline of Russell's theory:

i) that there is something which is F,

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[12] Michael Beaney, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8.

[13] Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting," *Mind* 14, no. 56 (1905): 490.

ii) that nothing other than that thing is F, and

iii) that thing – the unique thing which is F – is also G.[14]

For Russell, the interesting difficulty arises when the unique object, F, in fact fails to describe any real single object when it purports to do exactly that. In order to resolve this paradox, Russell considers the following proposition: "The King of France is bald." At first glance, this sentence appears to lack conventional meaning: France (as a modern-day Republic) has no present king, rendering the phrase "the King of France" nonsensical according to existing linguistic theories such as those proposed by Frege and Austrian philosopher Alexius Meinong. (As Russell observes, Meinong had previously asserted that these cases violated the law of contradiction, in which two contradictory statements cannot both be true at the same time; meanwhile, Frege avoided the crux of the issue by declaring such phrases as of a "null-class," or lacking a denotation and therefore void.[15]) By contrast, Russell claims to resolve this apparent difficulty by analyzing the logical forms of sentences that contain definite descriptions ("The King of France is bald") rather than the definite descriptions in isolation ("The King of France"). In doing so, he argues—in a notable departure from his contemporaries—that a denoting phrase does not actually need to denote anything in order to be classified as such; instead, it merely needs to adopt the form of a phrase that is denoting something. As Wittgenstein—Russell's student and eventual collaborator—would later write in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Only the proposition has sense; only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning."[16]

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[14] Peter Hylton, "The Theory of Descriptions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bertrand Russell*, ed. Nicholas Griffin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 204.
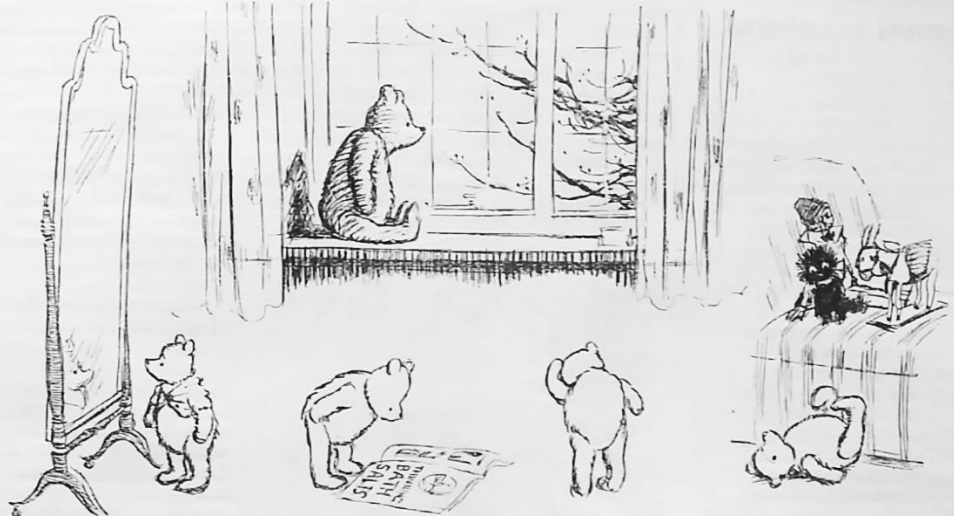
[15] Russell, "On Denoting," 484.

[16] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1922), 34.

Sense, in other words, can be inferred as long as an idea follows some recognized and accepted logical structure or form, regardless of the sentence's constituent components.[17]

This important idea, which focuses on the generation of meaning according to logical structures rather than isolated denotations, finds surprising but compelling traction in Milne's poem "Teddy Bear," which was published five years after Russell's *Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (1919) first appeared in print. (The latter work also contains references to the "King of France" paradox, and describes in much clearer detail the steps required to reconcile it according to Russell's theory of descriptions.) While the character of Winnie-the-Pooh did not yet exist as such in February 1924, Milne's thirteen-stanza poem—accompanied by the illustrations of Shepard, who also worked as an artist at *Punch*—features a stuffed bear named "Edward Bear" whose visual resemblance to Pooh is undeniable:

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[17] Russell, "On Denoting," 488.

Figure 3.2. Milne's "Teddy Bear," illustrated by Shepard and published in the February 1924 volume of *Punch*.[18]

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[18] Milne, "Teddy Bear," *Punch*, 13 February 1924, 157.

Through Milne's lighthearted verse, the speaker recounts the narrative of this anthropomorphized teddy bear, whose self-consciousness about his stout stature is alleviated when he stumbles across a storybook that features an unusual historical figure:

> One night it happened that he took
>
> A peep at an old picture-book,
>
> Wherein he came across by chance
>
> The picture of a King of France
>
> (A stoutish man) and, down below,
>
> These words: "King Louis So and So,
>
> Nicknamed 'The Handsome!'" There he sat,
>
> And (think of it!) the man was fat! [19]

The most obvious case to be made here about the allusion to Russell's theories is Milne's amusing portrayal of a King of France, whom—we learn later in the poem—in fact exists, not only in historical times, but in twentieth-century England as well. (Near the end of the poem, Edward Bear unwittingly tumbles out of a window and at the feet of a portly passerby, whom he asks: "Are you…by any chance / His Majesty the King of France?" The stanza continues with an affirmative: "The other answered, 'I am that.'") The joke here about the philosophy of linguistics operates on multiple levels: to begin with, the sudden appearance of a French king in modern-day England—however improbable—is rendered entirely natural here in a way that literalizes Russell's paradigm of definite descriptions. If the existence of a present-day King of France falls within the realm of linguistic and philosophical possibility, as Russell suggests, then Milne takes the idea a step further by allowing a real individual bearing the same title to materialize

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[19] Milne, "Teddy Bear."

conveniently from an old history book. In other words, here fictionalized verse gives new life to the unexpected or even seemingly nonsensical narratives that Russell's structure-based approach to logic makes imaginable.

Given the transformative power associated with the act of reading in this moment, it is especially fitting that Edward Bear's first encounter with the ostensible King of France occurs in the pages of a picture book, the very medium through which Milne would frame his collection of Pooh stories two years later. This key scene of visual and textual literacy features a reader that—like many of Milne's fantasy forest characters—is faced with a text containing material that deliberately lends itself to misinterpretation and seems to defy conventional reading. After seeing the king's picture and its accompanying caption, for instance, Edward Bear expresses infinite delight at finding such an unlikely figure in a picture book. "Our bear rejoiced like anything," the speaker observes of this moment, "To read about this famous King, / Nicknamed the 'Handsome.'"[20] Unbeknownst to the bear, however, the written description he reads actually has no corresponding object in the real world (that is, in French history): the book that Edward Bear peruses actually misattributes the nickname of King Philip IV "the Handsome" to the picture book's King Louis, creating a problem of historical inconsistency in additional to logical ambiguity.[21] But even this apparent contradiction proves irrelevant in a world of imaginative reading such as Milne's: as it turns out, the bear's joy remains justified according to the logic of this whimsical poem, whose fiction aims not to denote a real-world equivalent but rather to produce a narrative in which all possible denotations–even ones bordering on conventional nonsense—can exist. The perusal of books and literature more broadly, this moment implies, can

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[20] Milne, "Teddy Bear."

[21] For reference, the most proximate nickname associated with a King of France actually belonged to King Louis VI, who was called "le Gros," or "the Fat."

bridge a world of theorized linguistics with one in which even the most absurd or apparently nonsensical occurrences produce plausible narratives.

But Milne goes even further in his examination by suggesting that speakers can produce new meanings of their own as well, simply by refusing to adhere to the linguistic conventions on which theories of logic such as Russell's indelibly depend. The poem's reference to "King Louis So and So," for example, is lifted almost directly from Russell's discussion of descriptions as outlined in "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" (1911): "A phrase of the form 'a so-and-so,'" the philosopher explains, "I shall call an 'ambiguous' description; a phrase of the form 'the so-and-so' (in the singular) I shall call a 'definite' description…When we say 'the so-and-so exists', we mean that there is just one object which is the so-and-so."[22] Whereas Russell uses the hyphenated phrase "so-and-so" as a stand-in for the denoted object, Milne humorously transforms this phrase by capitalizing it and fusing it with the proper name "King Louis," thus giving "So and So" the appearance of being part of a definite description. Of course, the phrase "King Louis So and So" taken in its entirety is anything but definite: with at least seventeen French royal monarchs named Louis from which to choose, Edward Bear encounters in his picture book a king who seems to occupy a peculiarly uneasy position between definite and ambiguous description. This descriptive uncertainty is underscored by the peculiar structure of the preceding line, in which the speaker refers to "the picture of a King of France." By assigning a definite description ("the") to the typically ambiguous description "picture" rather than to the capitalized proper noun "King of France," Milne further calls into question the ostensible exclusivity of the latter. (Put differently: it is the book's picture that becomes "the so-and-so," while the royal "King of France" is reduced to a mere "a so-and-so.")

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[22] Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1912), 82-84.

As we shall see, this poem's ability to highlight the problems inherent in categorizing proper names as such proliferates significantly when applied to the fantasy world of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, whose characters frequently give meaning to words that they do not understand fully by treating them as pseudo-proper nouns. In the following section, I examine the ways in which these characters participate in systems of naming that continue to be fluid and transformative rather than limited by the rules of conventional language—in which, moreover, the competing narratives that produce proper names are perhaps more important than the proper names themselves. Through an analysis of various names associated with Milne's eponymous protagonist, I suggest that these systems actually celebrate the diverse narratives that emerge when proper names cease to designate a unique individual but rather become the domain of many different storytellers and interpreters. By recognizing this collaborative process of meaning-making as the defining logic of Milne's forest, I argue that *Winnie-the-Pooh* reimagines the scale of existing linguistic theories and extends the possibilities of linguistic meaningfulness to the level of a much broader community. This emphasis on community would also shift focus away from the detached theoreticism of early analytic philosophy (which was interested in linguistic form rather than use) toward a much more inclusive, hermeneutic model of language. Through this expansion, even acts of seemingly nonsensical misreading gain new significance, since they allow for a variety of interpretations that will together produce a shared (rather than merely theoretical or arbitrary) standard for meaning-making.

*Winnie-*Ther-*Pooh:*

Communities of Naming, Language, and Meaning-Making in Winnie-the-Pooh

In *Winnie-the-Pooh*, we see a much more pronounced fascination with the problematic functions of language and logic than initially appears in Milne's earlier verse for children. From humorous verbal misunderstandings to creative neologisms, the types of innovative linguistic play in which the inhabitants of Milne's fantasy forest engage are far too abundant and tempting to ignore. This preoccupation explains in part the disproportionate number of studies—both creative and scholarly—that revolves around dissecting the Pooh stories' representations of language, style, and other formal narrative elements. One need only think, for example, of Benjamin Hoff's well-known *Tao of Pooh* (1982), which reappropriates Milne's writing style and simpleminded characters in order to explain the tenets of Taoism, or "the Way of the Universe."[23] Alternatively, one might consider Frederick Crews's *The Pooh Perplex* (1963), a biting satire that offers Milne's stories as proof that modern literary critics are capable of overanalyzing virtually anything—a point that is certainly not without its merits. As P.R. Honeycomb (one of the many fictional contributors to Crews's collection) pontificates in his analysis of "bardic verse" and "the hums of Pooh": "Almost, one does not know where to begin. This Pooh, excruciated by ponderings as to the whatness and the howness of things, can startle by the windings and rewindings of his imagination, by murky gyrations wherein we can scarcely follow."[24]

Fortunately, the scholarship surrounding the function of language in Milne's Pooh stories

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[23] Benjamin Hoff, *The Tao of Pooh* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 4.

[24] Frederick Crews, *The Pooh Perplex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 29.

has tended to be more intelligible than Crews has suggested, with an overwhelming number of these studies (including, as I have previously noted, Wullschläger's) focusing on the function of categories such as linguistic and logical play. This critical preoccupation—with nonsense in particular—extends as far back as to the year of *Winnie-the-Pooh*'s publication, when Marcia Dalphin observed in her review of Milne's book: "Here is nonsense in the best tradition; entirely plausible on the surface, as true nonsense always is, with good sense at its core, and the high seriousness about it that children and other wise people love. The illusion is perfect."[25] In contrast to analyses of Carroll's *Alice* stories and other well-known authors of "nonsense literature," however, the use of the term "nonsense" by Milne scholars has remained fairly broad and rarely been applied with critical rigor. Wim Tigges has challenged these approaches in part by asserting that the classification of *Winnie-the-Pooh* as a work of nonsense is both methodologically and generically mistaken. Instead, he suggests that Milne's book is more accurately a work of fantasy: according to Tigges, the tendency of Milnes' characters to create new words and unusual names "is not so much a matter of creating nonsense as of poking fun at the use of difficult words" by pompous adult-like characters or reimagining the world in terms that are familiar to them.[26] Although Tigges's critiques raise an important point about scholars' tendencies to misclassify the Pooh stories as works of nonsense literature, what these studies share nonetheless is an impulse to categorize Milne's narratives according to some structured mode of genre, logic, or sense. Much more rarely do these studies engage in a sustained examination of the ways in which Milne's stories actively resist such rigid structures in favor of more generative and subjective ones.

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[25] Marcia Dalphin, "Mr. Edward Bear, His Book," *New York Herald Tribune Books*, 17 October 1926.

[26] Tim Wigges, *An Anatomy of Nonsense Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 110.

Yet it is crucial to understand Milne's work of fantasy fiction in terms of this precise resistance, which—as I suggested in my earlier analysis of "Teddy Bear"—enables the Pooh stories to illuminate the limitations of viewing the world through purely formal (and problematically formulaic) theories of language and epistemology. In order to trace most clearly the evolution of Milne's ideas on this score, it will be useful to turn once again to his treatment of proper names and engagement with existing theories of language, this time in the wider context of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. For no matter how familiar it has become, this tripartite proper name itself bears a complex history: it reveals the author's increasing sense that even ostensibly unique entities (such as an individual denoted by a proper name) are produced not in isolation, but rather through much broader networks of meaning-making such as those found in his fantasy forest. In his preface to *Winnie-the-Pooh*, for instance, Milne establishes this idea by providing an unexpectedly complicated account of his protagonist's name:

> If you happen to have read another book about Christopher Robin, you may remember that he once had a swan (or the swan had Christopher Robin, I don't know which) and that he used to call this swan Pooh. That was a long time ago, and when we said good-bye, we took the name with us, as we didn't think the swan would want it any more. Well, when Edward Bear said that he would like an exciting name all to himself, Christopher Robin said at once, without stopping to think, that he was Winnie-the-Pooh. And he was.[27]

One immediately observes in this account that the act of naming is outwardly referential rather than internally unique: here, the names "Edward Bear" (of "Teddy Bear" fame) and "Pooh" (a swan) do not belong to the eponymous protagonist but rather to a set of texts and

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[27] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*.

characters that precede Winnie-the-Pooh altogether. For the preexisting proper names in this passage refuse to stay affixed to the unique subjects they are meant to denote: the joke encompassed by Edward Bear's observation that "he would like an exciting name all to himself," for example, depends on the idea that proper names are not perhaps very useful as concrete markers of denotation (since they can belong to anyone who claims it as his own), but assume a much more fulfilling role when treated as intertextual bridges. In contrast to early analytic philosophy's narrow understanding of denotation, this view of naming establishes the important idea that proper names might actually serve as portals to a much wider range of narratives and characters, which together have culminated to create this particular use of the name.

This logic is concretized through the ostensible origins of the name "Pooh," which—far from indicating a singular subject—actually operates as a pointed denial of such uniqueness. In his introduction to *When We Were Very Young* (1924), for example, Milne explains: "[Pooh] is a very fine name for a swan, because, if you call him and he doesn't come (which is a thing swans are good at), then you can pretend that you were just saying 'Pooh!' to show how little you wanted him."[28] Even here, Milne reveals a surprising familiarity with the history of linguistic theory and remains entrenched in his jokes about these debates to the last: the framing story that he offers about "Pooh" in this introduction recalls Max Müller's reflections in 1861 about the origins of human speech, which included what Müller (the same linguist who befriended Carroll at Oxford) called the "Pooh-Pooh theory" of language. In one of his lectures on the science of language, the philologist critiqued the idea that early language had simply been the outgrowth of emotional exclamations (such as "Pooh!") and argued that such interjectional sounds hardly separated the animal from the human. Instead, he observed that the real origins of language

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[28] Milne, *When We Were Very Young* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1961), vii.

occurred when spontaneous interjections ended and the formation of deliberate words began, adding: "We must not forget that *hum! ugh! tut! pooh!* are as little to be called words as the expressive gestures which usually accompany these exclamations."[29]

As in his parody of Russell's "King So and So" in "Teddy Bear," Milne's decision to transform a well-known theory of language into a proper name—"Pooh!"—humorously undermines the pedantry of such theories, which fail to account for the playfulness of language when used in a non-theoretical context. Moreover, the childishness associated with this exclamation reinforces the word's empowering double function: it acts as a source of identification, but it also offers a safeguard against what will happen if that proper name fails to attach properly to its unique subject. In other words, the dismissive exclamation "Pooh!" serves as a preemptive recognition that the swan might not acknowledge the name that it has been given and allows Christopher Robin to transform a name into a denial of that very act of naming. Far from trying to distinguish his protagonist from the savage origins of language by using a unique proper name, as Carroll does with Alice, Milne actually transforms the exclamation here into an unlikely marker of individual identity.[30] By locating the origins of his protagonist in a largely dismissed theory about the origins of human language, Milne thus demonstrates that these far-removed debates illuminate very little about the ways in which language is used, especially by

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[29] Max Müller, "The Theoretical Stage, and the Origin of Language," in *The Origin of Language*, ed. Roy Harris (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 25.

[30] The fluidity with which Milne uses proper names is particularly apparent in the author's use of the name "Christopher Robin" throughout both his verse and fictional prose for children between 1924 and 1928. Milne's son, Christopher Milne, aptly summarizes this pattern in his autobiography, *The Enchanted Places*: "But the Christopher Robin who appears in so many of the poems is not always me. For this was where my name, so totally useless to me personally, came into its own: it was a wonderful name for writing poetry round. So sometimes my father is using it to describe something I did, and sometimes he is borrowing it to describe something he did as a child, and sometimes he is using it to describe something that any child might have done" ([London: Eyre Methuen, 1974], 24).

children who are still learning to navigate the world of words and meaning.

These playful inversions of existing theories of language generate in turn much of the sustaining fantasy logic according to which naming and language in Milne's forest operates. At the beginning of the first chapter, for instance (and even as late as in chapter two), the adult narrator problematically reintroduces Winnie-the-Pooh not as such, but rather as "Edward Bear." The interchangeability of these names exerts a transformative power over the narrative, allowing the narrator to bridge seamlessly the real world occupied by a lifeless stuffed toy (Edward Bear), on the one hand, and the lively fantasy world inhabited by the anthropomorphized Winnie-the-Pooh, on the other hand:

> 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. And then he feels that perhaps there isn't. Anyhow, here he is at the bottom, and ready to be introduced to you. Winnie-the-Pooh.
>
> When I first heard his name, I said, just as you are going to say, "But I thought he was a boy?"
>
> "So did I," said Christopher Robin.
>
> "Then you can't call him Winnie?"
>
> "I don't."
>
> "But you said—"
>
> "He's Winnie-ther-Pooh. Don't you know what '*ther*' means?"
>
> "Ah, yes, now I do," I said quickly; and I hope you do too, because it is all the

explanation you are going to get.[31]

This pivotal scene has garnered a variety of analyses, from Paula T. Connolly's observation that the stuffed bear is the single character other than Christopher Robin to be given a proper name, to Brian Paltridge's suggestion that the stuffed bear's identity "is made clear at the end of the first paragraph where Edward Bear's informal name is presented to the reader: Winnie-the-Pooh. The relationship between *his name* and *Winnie-the-Pooh* is one of *naming*."[32] What is most striking about this opening episode, however, is the narrator's ability to avoid the very type of naming that Paltridge associates with this moment. Edward Bear is never named "Winnie-the-Pooh" in either this opening passage or the book's introduction—rather, he simply *is* such: "Here he is at the bottom, and ready to be introduced to you. Winnie-the-Pooh." In this scene, Milne refuses to engage in the kinds of traditional naming practices that might detract from the full effect of an act of fantastic transformation. The metamorphosis from stuffed bear to anthropomorphized character is instantaneous and complete, and bypasses the slippery distinction between an object and its proper name by avoiding such qualifying propositional phrases as "was called" or "was named." While this paradigm becomes more problematic as the narrative progresses, the narrator's refusal here to locate Winnie-the-Pooh within a fixed system of naming marks a liberating moment in Milne's story: it suggests that the identity of its fictional characters relies on a fantasy logic that remains associated with proper names, but is not necessarily restricted by the boundaries of linguistic convention.

Of course, this is not to suggest that Milne's narrative attempts to transcend the

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[31] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 1-2.

[32] Paula T. Connolly, *"Winnie-the-Pooh" and "The House at Pooh Corner": Recovering Arcadia* (New York: Twayne, 1995); Brian Paltridge, *Discourse Analysis: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 126.

boundaries of language: on the contrary, moments such as these underscore the importance of adopting more imaginative and unconventional approaches to using language, which can be leveraged as a tool for creating more interesting narratives as well. Milne makes this point most clearly in the opening scene through his adult narrator, who exemplifies a very limited view of the possibilities offered by the seemingly ordinary proper name "Winnie." "Then you can't call him Winnie?" the narrator asks Christopher Robin, pointing out the unsuitability of a traditionally feminine name for a male stuffed bear. The latter, however, is quick to distinguish himself from these restrictive associations, which have no place in his imaginative world: "I don't," he responds matter-of-factly. "He's Winnie-ther-Pooh." The young boy's emphasis— which relies on a stressed "ther" rather than a clipped "the"—marks a very British form of English, in which the child stresses the definite article in order to draw attention to it and to mark what follows as the unique object to which he is referring. What is both amusing and compelling about Christopher Robin's use of "ther" rather than "the," however, is that he has mistaken the two for entirely separate words: presumably, he has been taught to use the former as a type of clarification, but without being informed that stressing a definite article does not change the word's meaning. This type of antisthecon, which occurs when a speaker alters a word by changing a letter or syllable (often through mispronunciation), clearly highlights Christopher Robin's childish and limited understanding of conventional language use.

Yet the boy's youthful pronunciation remains key to concretizing this moment of metamorphosis, which changes an innocuously overemphasized definite article into an instrument of semantic and linguistic transformation. Much like the earlier instance concerning "the picture of a King of France," Christopher Robin's use of a definite article in an unexpected context changes the meaning of the entire proper name: it remains unclear whether "ther" still

marks the stuffed bear as a unique subject (the only "Pooh") or something entirely different. (As the narrator remarks: "I hope you [know what 'ther' means] too, because it is all the explanation you are going to get.") In other words, Christopher Robin modifies the conditions of naming, absorbing the traditionally female name "Winnie" into a compound name with an unexpected link—Winnie-*ther*-Pooh—and thus erasing any associations that the original name might possess outside of the text. (As I will discuss later in this section, this act of orthographic transformation anticipates a form of anti-descriptivism, in which proper names are not merely synonymous with a cluster of descriptions satisfied by a unique object.) In this critical moment, the name "Winnie-the(r)-Pooh" merges established ways of naming with a more ludic system, one in which linguistic approximations can make meaning that is more adaptable than their conventional counterparts. As Milne demonstrates, the mistakes that children make as they try to understand the ways in which language works produce new, rejuvenating possibilities for resignification throughout the narrative. These renewed meanings, in turn, rely on the idea that knowledge is not pre-given (as denotative theorists assume), but rather generated through the very errors that speakers make through their imaginative explorations of language.

One notable example of this adaptable epistemology appears through the introduction of Piglet, a small creature whose constant anxiety is matched only by his penchant for making up stories to explain things that he does not understand fully:

> Next to [Piglet's] house was a piece of broken board which had:
> "TRESPASSERS W" on it. When Christopher Robin asked the Piglet what it meant, he said it was his grandfather's name, and had been in the family for a long time. Christopher Robin said you *couldn't* be called Trespassers W, and Piglet said yes, you could, because his grandfather was, and it was short for Trespassers Will, which was

short for Trespassers William. And his grandfather had had two names in case he lost one—Trespassers after an uncle, and William after Trespassers.[33]

Proper names fulfill a slightly different function here than they do in Milne's introduction and first chapter. The words on the broken sign, one of course assumes, do not refer to a name or individual at all but rather to some truncated variation on the warning "Trespassers will be prosecuted":
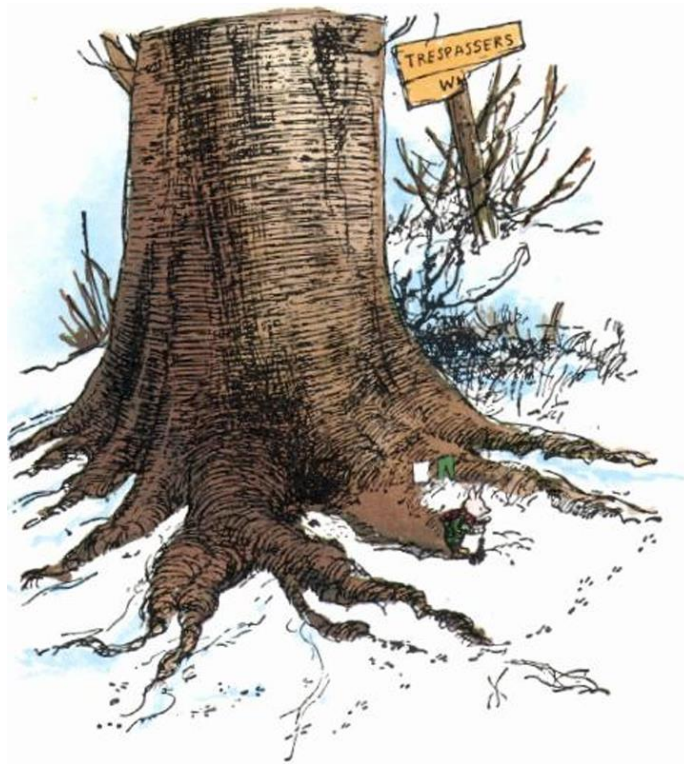
Figure 3.3. "Next to his house was a piece of broken board which had: 'TRESSPASSERS W' on it."[34]

While the narrative associates names such as "Winnie-the-Pooh" with certain existing objects or histories, the words "Trespassers W" inspire a reverse process: they transform a sign that is originally associated with exclusive property ownership into a fictional narrative about family

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[33] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 33.

[34] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 33.

genealogy. By ignoring the fact that his property (which is associated with generational inheritance) has fallen into a state of disrepair, Piglet also fails to see that the very fiction he has created is at all problematic or incongruent.

Paradoxically, however, Piglet's ability to overlook these details allows him to participate in a new kind of misreading, in which made-up stories can be as valid (if not more compelling) than the original messages that they obscure. His imaginative misinterpretation of this sign may be naïve—but it also frees him from the limitations of prior histories and allows him to produce narratives that derive very much from the present moment, and from his interpretation of texts in their current (rather than intended) form. In this sense, his misreading also prompts an important discussion within Milne's narrative about whether meaning-making in the forest is located at the level of the original writer/speaker (as proposed in highly structured theoretical analyses of linguistics) or that of the reader/listener. For Milne, the constant tension between intended meaning and interpretive license is central to understanding the forest, which shifts the boundaries of linguistic philosophy well beyond anything offered by existing analytic philosophies of language.

The narrative foregrounds this tension in part through the reintroduction of Christopher Robin, who initially refuses to believe Piglet's explanation because it violates the boy's preconceptions about what constitutes a proper name. When Christopher Robin points out matter-of-factly that an individual cannot be named "Trespassers W," however, Piglet immediately changes tack by incorporating this feedback into his narrative and clarifying that the "W" is a shorthand for a more conventional proper name: "William." As the passage makes plain, this type of hasty and somewhat haughty self-revision is characteristic of Milne's animal characters, which constantly recalibrate their use of language to account for logical gaps or other

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semantic inconsistencies that they have not considered on their own. In this particular scene, Piglet's ability to address Christopher Robin's skepticism produces a momentary connection between the two characters: once Piglet updates his narrative, the young boy acknowledges that they actually share an underlying framework by remarking that he—like "Trespassers William"—has two names as well, and thus accepts Piglet's unusual logic. Although both characters are motivated by selfish desires to appear correct and unconcerned, they nevertheless participate in a mode of meaning-making that relies on a willingness to remain responsive to others' narratives about naming.

In this respect, Milne's characters practice a form of linguistic and semantic logic that had recently been proposed by progressive philosophers such as John Dewey, who believed that words are produced almost exclusively through social contexts. In *Experience and Nature* (1925), for instance, Dewey returns to Müller's ideas concerning the origins of language and explains that the "rival accounts of the origin of language that go by the nicknames of bow-wow, pooh-pooh, and ding-dong theories are not in fact theories of the origin of language," but rather accounts of "how and why certain sounds rather than others were selected to signify objects, acts and situations."[35] These linguistic choices, Dewey maintains, occur through the mutual interests and efforts of a particular social group—an idea, as I demonstrate in the final section of this chapter, that would become crucial to Milne's conception of the democratization of education and literacy in his Pooh sequel, *The House at Pooh Corner*. This collective approach to producing meaning throughout *Winnie-the-Pooh* explains in part the recurrence of mispronounced words, which make sense to Milne's characters simply because everyone is able to agree on a common meaning for an uncommon (or altogether invented) word. The distortion

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[35] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1929), 175-76, https://archive.org/details/experienceandnat029343mbp (accessed 17 May 2017).

of the word "expedition" into "Expotition," for example, does not prevent the animals from embarking on a journey to discover the North Pole; likewise, Rabbit's assertion that the exclamation "*Aha!*" means "We'll tell you where Baby Roo is, if you promise to go away from the Forest and never come back" maintains its meaning by virtue of the fact that everyone consents to using this particular definition.[36] Although there are clear difficulties with this model of meaning-making (one obvious issue is the problem of conformity, in which members agree simply out of pressure to assimilate to a group standard), these instances suggest that Milne's narrative is very much engaged in these ideas concerning community-generated language.

The works of Milne, Dewey, and other twentieth-century philosophers who were interested in the socializing function of language also anticipate a much later theoretical shift toward anti-descriptivism: the idea that names become attached to individuals not as definite descriptors, but rather by virtue of the name's acceptance and use by a broader community of speakers. This causal theory of reference would later be laid out most clearly in the 1970s by American logician and philosopher Saul Kripke, who opposes early analytic theories of descriptivism by regarding names as rigid designators, which are created at the moment of naming (or what Kripke calls an "initial baptism").[37] While Kripke refuses to endorse this idea unequivocally, he suggests (much as Dewey does) that there might be a communal quality associated with the functions of names for which Russell and his colleagues' theoretical systems do not account. In *Naming and Necessity*—a series of three lectures delivered in 1970 and published as transcripts a decade later—Kripke thus explains: "When the name is 'passed from link to link,' the receiver of the name must, I think, intend when he learns it to use it with the

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[36] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 91.

[37] Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 96.

same reference as the man from whom he heard it. If I hear the name 'Napoleon' and decide it would be a nice name for my pet aardvark, I do not satisfy this condition."[38] As in the case of Piglet and Christopher Robin, who must learn to agree on a common usage for the fictionalized name "Trespassers William," this approach depends not on the original message but on the characters' shared subsequent framework of referentiality. In addition, he refutes the assumption (maintained by Frege, Russell, and other theorists) that anything that is "necessarily true" can be known independently of experience.[39] For Kripke as for Milne, this false notion of *a priori* knowledge is misleading because it fails to account for cases in which subsequent (or *a posteriori*) knowledge expressed through a name is still necessarily true. Although Kripke's response to descriptivism would appear over forty years after *Winnie-the-Pooh*, these ideas usefully illuminate the extent to which Milne's writing anticipates many of the same objections—and engages in many of the same conversations—that anti-descriptivists such as Kripke would later raise about the tenets of early analytic philosophy.

This highly responsive approach to the creation of meaningful semantic systems characterizes many of *Winnie-the-Pooh*'s most memorable moments, which not only are built on a single individual's misuse of language but also depend heavily on characters' abilities to work together in order to produce mutually intelligible meanings. To take one particularly illustrative example of this dynamic: when Winnie-the-Pooh goes to find Owl in the Hundred Acre Wood and asks him to write a birthday message for their friend Eeyore, the exchange between the two characters makes it clear that neither has a firm grasp of conventional written language. Despite this shared shortcoming, Owl and Pooh manage to settle on a mutually agreeable system of

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[38] Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 96.

[39] Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 34.

literacy:

> "Can you read, Pooh?" [Owl] asked, a little anxiously. "There's a notice about knocking and ringing outside my door, which Christopher Robin wrote. Could you read it?"
>
> "Christopher Robin told me what it said, and *then* I could."
>
> "Well, I'll tell you what *this* says, and then you'll be able to."
>
> So Owl wrote…and this is what he wrote.
>
> HIPY PAPY BTHUTHDTH THUTHDA BTHUTHDY
>
> Pooh looked on admiringly.
>
> "I'm just saying 'A Happy Birthday,'" said Owl carelessly.
>
> "It's a nice long one," said Pooh, very much impressed by it.
>
> "Well, *actually*, of course, I'm saying 'A Very Happy Birthday with love from Pooh.' Naturally it takes a good deal of pencil to say a long thing like that."[40]

As Anita Wilson observes, the imbalance that characterizes the two creatures' relationships to formal spelling is immediately apparent: Owl's condescension, which stems from a false sense of superiority and education, prompts him to feign an orthographic familiarity that he does not actually possess. Wilson concludes: "Pooh, whose spelling is 'wobbly,' is much impressed by Owl's lengthy Happy Birthday message to Eeyore—the longer, the better, and since Pooh can't read, Owl's reputation for literacy is quite safe."[41]

But this moment offers more than a simple joke about the unequal balance of knowledge

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[40] Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, 82-83.

[41] Anita Wilson, "Milne's Pooh Books: The Benevolent Forest" in *Touchstones: Reflections on the Best in Children's Literature*, ed. Perry Nodelman (West Lafayette: ChLA Publishers, 1985), 169.

and status in Milne's fantasy forest. It also reveals a community in which meanings are most productively mediated through more than one individual: in which, moreover, the act of making meaning is always dependent on another's acceptance of this meaning. On the one hand, Pooh's initial request for "A Happy Birthday" evolves into much more elaborate message under Owl's supervision—not because Owl demonstrates the ability to write well, but precisely because his atrocious spelling requires him to compensate by being more inventive with his oral production of meaning. On the other hand, Owl relies on Pooh for this creativity as well: whereas Owl's spelling itself does not express any conventional meaning, the act of explanation in which he engages is both inspired and approved by Pooh, who later passes on the message to Eeyore as his own. "Here it is," he declares as he presents his newly christened pot to the donkey. "And it's got 'A Very Happy Birthday with love from Pooh' written on it. That's what all that writing is. And it's for putting things in. There!" It is important to note that this moment of seamless evolution—from Owl's misspelling to Pooh's unquestioning dissemination of the revised message within the broader forest community—remains entirely within the spirit of Pooh's original request and, if anything, augments the sentiments that the bear alone would have been able to convey. Although Pooh rejects Owl's request to take credit for gifting the pot as well ("Couldn't I give it too? From both of us?" he asks earlier), the resultant gift is thus still very much the product of their joint efforts toward generating a single unified birthday message. In contrast to the individual figures of authority that characterize storytelling throughout Barrie's *Peter Pan* myth, this model of narrative creation is improvisational and assigned to multiple authors, who together can create meaning according to something resembling democratic consensus.

Meaning-making in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, of course, is not always such a collaborative endeavor and becomes especially complicated with characters who seem to fall outside the

prescribed semantic systems within Milne's forest. One individual in particular—the reclusive and ever gloomy donkey, Eeyore—offers an illuminating point of resistance to the animals' community-based system of meaning-making: his frequent exclusion from key events and uncomfortable position at the periphery of the narrative prevents him from communicating effectively with many of the other characters, who often find him enigmatic or downright incomprehensible. (On the map that appears on the book's end pages, his place of residence—located at the right bottom-most corner of the page—is quite tellingly titled "EEYORES GLOOMY PLACE RATHER BOGGY AND SAD.")[42] As flexible as language and meaning appear to be throughout Milne's stories, the community-oriented mindset of these characters also creates a problematic impulse toward homogeneity, in which dissenting or aberrational voices can be quickly silenced or ignored by the majority. (This is also an important point to which my later analysis on the democratization of language will return.) Whether Eeyore is complaining to nobody in particular about the numbness of his tail or making inappropriate thank-you speeches at a party that is actually meant to celebrate somebody else, his inability to express his thoughts in readily accessible ways positions him as something of an outcast throughout the animals' adventures. Even in a world as interrelational as the forest, the intrusion of this seldom understood figure transforms Milne's largely cooperative model of language into one that must account for individual differences in meaning-making as well.

This idea manifests most clearly in Eeyore's interactions with Winnie-the-Pooh, whose reputation as a simpleminded bear paradoxically grants him more patience and willingness to listen to Eeyore than others are ready to exhibit. During a scene in which he finds the glum donkey standing beside a stream, the latter greets Pooh with a set of characteristically cryptic

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[42] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*.

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remarks that the bear must then attempt to decipher:

"Good morning, Pooh Bear," said Eeyore gloomily. "If it *is* a good morning," he said. "Which I doubt," said he.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, Pooh Bear, nothing. We can't all, and some of us don't. That's all there is to it."

"Can't all *what*?" said Pooh, rubbing his nose.

"Gaiety. Song-and-dance. Here we go round the mulberry bush."[43]

…Pooh sat down on a large stone, and tried to think this out. It sounded to him like a riddle, and he was never much good at riddles, being a Bear of Very Little Brain. So he sang *Cottleston Pie* instead:

Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie,

A fly can't bird, but a bird can fly.

Ask me a riddle and I reply:

"*Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie.*" [44]

Although at first glance there seems to be little substance behind this whimsical poem, Hoff describes "Cottleston Pie" as an important expression of recognizing one's individuality: "There's nothing wrong with not being able to whistle, especially if you're a fish," he writes in *The Tao of Pooh*, citing the poem's second stanza. "But there can be lots of things wrong with blindly trying to do what you aren't designed for."[45] This straightforward interpretation is

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[43] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 70-72.

[44] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 72.

[45] Hoff, *Tao of Pooh*, 43.

actually reaffirmed through the structure of the poem, which in many ways allows Pooh to become more cognizant of the unique function that Eeyore fulfills in the forest. Unable to interpret his friend's oddly compressed sentences, for instance, Pooh immediately responds to them by dissembling and reconstructing their logic in verse form. The singsong rhythm of Pooh's improvised verse (which alternates between dactylic and iambic tetrameter) echoes Eeyore's earlier remarks about the mulberry bush, which are lifted directly from a children's rhyme that gained popularity throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and persisted well into the twentieth. Pooh's use of full rhymes and reiteration of words throughout the poem reinforces this connection—his repetitious "Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie" recalls the first stanza of Eeyore's cited nursery rhyme, which traditionally reads: "Here we go round the mulberry bush / The mulberry bush / The mulberry bush / Here we go round the mulberry bush / So early in the morning."[46] By emulating the circularity of this rhyme in his own poetry, Pooh suggests that he is listening actively to the contents of Eeyore's speech and attempting to assimilate them into more coherent patterns. If Pooh is (as he admits) a "Bear of Very Little Brain," his ability both to internalize and recreate the substance of Eeyore's remarks through his own verse suggests that a considerable degree of cognitive processing undergirds the bear's seemingly vacuous poetry.

But unlike a typical school-age Edwardian child (who is accustomed only to reciting memorized verses with little regard for their content), Pooh does not simply repeat the poetry of

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[46] James Orchard Halliwell, *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales* (London: John Russell Smith, 1849), 127, https://archive.org/details/popularrhymesan00philgoog (accessed 17 May 2017).

others.[47] Instead, his obsession with regenerating form here actually produces an unexpected level of depth and empathy for his friend that far exceeds Daniela Almansi's classification of "Cottleston Pie" as a nonsense poem.[48] For one thing, Pooh's poetry reveals the bear's deep-seated desire to help Eeyore express himself more intelligibly, as when Pooh muses in the opening stanza: "A fly can't bird, but a bird can fly." Far from being a mere tautology, this observation cleverly reappropriates the "can't" structure of Eeyore's earlier remark—"We can't all, and some of us don't"—and transforms it into a complete (if equally curious) contemplation on the grammatical limitations of different parts of speech. Here, "fly" has the ability to function as both a verb and noun, while "bird" makes conventional sense only when used as a noun. Apart from highlighting the arbitrariness of syntax and grammar, this realization marks a significant breakthrough for the bear: it allows Pooh to understand suddenly why his question ("Can't all *what*?") and Eeyore's subsequent response ("Gaiety. Song-and-dance") are so incompatible. The latter, it appears, has employed anthimeria (or the use one part of speech as another part of speech) by unexpectedly exchanging a "can't all *verb*" sentence structure for a "can't all *noun*" one.

With this new awareness in mind, Pooh discovers that he is able to make more sense of his friend's unconventional expressions, and he works hard to push Eeyore toward the production of meaningful, mutually comprehensible conversation. In the third stanza, he thus reflects:

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[47] For more context on the history of memorized verses in Great Britain, see Catherine Robson, *Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[48] Daniela Almansi, "Nonsensing Translation: How to Turn the Spotlight on the Blind Spots of Interpretation," *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 53, no. 3 (2015): 57.

Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie,

Why does a chicken, I don't know why.

Ask me a riddle and I reply:

"*Cottleston, Cottleston, Cottleston Pie.*"[49]

The truncated joke that Pooh makes here about a chicken, of course, is no longer based on syntax but rather on the content of a riddle that first appeared in the *Knickerbocker* in March 1847: "'Why does a chicken cross the street?' Are you 'out of town?' Do you 'give it up?' Well, then: 'Because it wants to get on the other side!'"[50] The anti-humor that characterizes this popular joke lends Pooh's lighthearted poem a hint of irony that allows him—surprisingly—to match the sarcastic tenor of his friend's gloominess. What is more, this last stanza—which embraces rather than resists the fragmented structure of Eeyore's earlier statements ("Why does a chicken, I don't know why")—finally prompts a new answer from Eeyore: "That's right," the donkey says as soon as Pooh finishes, "Sing. Umty-tiddly, umty-too."[51] The subtle substitution of a verb ("sing") for Eeyore's previous, incongruent nouns ("gaiety," "song-and-dance") implies that Pooh's poetic contemplation has at last enabled Eeyore to express his previously incomplete thought: "We can't all *sing*, and some of us don't." Of course, Eeyore's own ditty—"umty-tiddly, umty-too"—suggests that he does in fact sing and that he is capable of surprising moments of connectivity with other characters. In this scene, Milne suggests that even the surface silliness of Pooh's poetry, which is motivated by empathy, can establish a striking level

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[49] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 73.

[50] *The Knickerbocker, or The New York Monthly*, vol. 29 (New York: John Allen, 1847), 283, https://archive.org/stream/knickerbockeror06unkngoog#page/n8/mode/2up (accessed 17 May 2017).

[51] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 73.

of shared linguistic continuity between two characters where none existed before. In other words, the author makes a critical distinction between linguistic repetition and mere semantic staticity; he demonstrates instead that reiteration in the forest can be fundamentally generative, allowing individuals to understand and connect with others whose linguistic frameworks may at first appear foreign to the listener.

It is also this significant shift—toward not only a community-oriented model of meaning-making, but a more tolerant and open one as well—that best defines Milne's expansive vision for language use and marks his most notable contribution to the discourse surrounding philosophies of language. If Milne's stories begin with a lighthearted examination of how proper names refuse to stay attached to a particular subject, they conclude with a very clear sense that names and words alike are meaningful only when they possess some sort of social value. Language is at its most powerful, in short, when individuals treat it as an agent of inclusivity rather than a lofty concept to be discussed within an exclusive circle of theorists. It is unsurprisingly this increasing sense of urgency that drives some of the climactic final scenes in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, which afford Milne the opportunity to detach his community of speakers from Russell's myth of definite description once and for all.

In the book's penultimate chapter, for instance, Winnie-the-Pooh invents an ingenious scheme to save his friend Piglet from a tree. This plan, which involves repurposing Christopher Robin's umbrella as a boat in order to navigate the flooded forest, prompts the following (and seemingly uncontainable) series of descriptions from Milne's narrator:

> And then this Bear, Pooh Bear, Winnie-the-Pooh, F.O.P (Friend of Piglet's), R.C. (Rabbit's Companion), P.D. (Pole Discoverer), E.C. and T.F. (Eeyore's Comforter and Tail-finder)—in fact Pooh himself—said something so clever that Christopher Robin

could only look at him with mouth open and eyes staring, wondering if this was really the

Bear of Very Little Brain whom he had known and loved so long.[52]

A striking sense of evolution characterizes the order in which Pooh's various names appear here:

the difficulties surrounding the bear's proper name at the beginning of Milne's stories (Pooh

Bear, Winnie-the-Pooh) quickly fade away, leaving behind a much more concrete set of names

that are defined instead by Pooh's relationships to other characters in the forest (Friend of

Piglet's, Rabbit's Companion, and so forth). For this reason, Christopher Robin must also

reconsider the idea that Pooh is simply a "Bear of Very Little Brain" since this description—that

is, a lack of formal intelligence—is highly individualized and now seems irrelevant compared to

his friend's wider importance within the forest. At last, the framing logic of Milne's fantasy

world comes full circle: proper names, the author makes clear in this pivotal moment, are

meaningful only insofar as they reveal the communities and relationships in which an individual

is embedded.

This new approach to understanding the relational scales of naming and language

broadens the scope of Milne's narrative, which ultimately grapples with much larger questions of

language and referentiality than the animals' apparently self-enclosed world at first seems

capable of containing. As I have suggested in the preceding sections, this sense of linguistic and

hermeneutic expansion is vital to understanding Milne's often overlooked engagement with

contemporaneous thought concerning the philosophy of language, and early analytic philosophy

in particular. Perhaps more important to Milne's vision, though, is the idea that only through

such sociable communities of meaning-making can language truly become the domain of the

everyman rather than the specialist alone. Paradoxically, this impulse toward conceptual clarity

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[52] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 142.

and accessibility is precisely what Russell and his colleagues tried to achieve when they first proposed an analytic approach to linguistics, which purported to resist the earlier abstractions of British idealism. Milne's stories, however—with their emphasis on privileging speakers, writers, listeners, and readers at all levels of comprehension and interpretation—are considerably more successful on this score than any elite theoretical framework for language could hope to be. This success, which derives in large part from these tales' ability to humanize and add crucial social context for the use of language, has certainly helped established *Winnie-the-Pooh* as one of the most memorable works within the canon of English children's literature.

This democratically-minded vision, moreover, would serve as an important foundation for the evolution of the author's own thoughts concerning literacy, education, and interpretation two years later, when he published his well-known sequel to his original Pooh stories. As I propose in the following section, *The House at Pooh Corner* shifts its emphasis away from the communal naming and linguistic systems that preoccupy the forest's inhabitants specifically, taking as its subject instead the formal systems of education that facilitate learning and language acquisition within Milne's fantasy world. This marked shift in the author's interests was not without its compelling reasons, either: during this critical two-year period, the very figure whose theories of language Milne had readily critiqued in *Winnie-the-Pooh* would publish another important study, this time about the modern-day relationship between education and democracy. This book—Russell's *On Education* (1926)—quickly became an influential work within the educational reform community and contributed to an already energized debate led by prominent figures such as Dewey, who was also a well-known social reformer. Without overstating the direct influence of Russell's thoughts on Milne's second Pooh book, I nevertheless suggest that Milne's readiness to engage with the problems of formal learning throughout *The House at Pooh*

Corner reveals the author's heightened interest in these renewed discussions concerning democracy, pedagogy, and social context. In particular, Milne's writing reconsiders the idea that shared systems of language alone can produce the most meaningful narratives within any given community and examines the importance of cultivating a collectively-minded approach to education, specifically. The author's second book thus examines the problems that characterize existing, hierarchical modes of learning and suggests that it is only by establishing a more inclusive formal system that an open, democratic community can truly be achieved.

2. "'What is Learning? A thing *Rabbit* knows!'":

The Problematic Democratization of Education and Knowledge in The House at Pooh Corner

By the time Milne published *The House at Pooh Corner* in 1928, the author's perception of what he could hope to achieve through his writing for children had altered to a considerable degree. Whereas *Winnie-the-Pooh* expresses a primarily productive view of community values, relationships between characters, and the playfulness of language, I have suggested that this view is perhaps not an entirely unproblematic one in Milne's fantasy world. It therefore comes as little surprise that the author's second collection of Pooh stories—which is much more transparent in its exploration of these points of tension—treats issues such as formal learning and literacy with considerably more skepticism than does its predecessor. Biographers of Milne's work such as Ann Thwaite have attributed this tonal shift in part to Milne's undesired but explosive success after publishing *When We Were Very Young* and *Winnie-the-Pooh*, which contemporaneous readers hailed as the defining works of his writing career. (As Milne himself once complained: "It is easier in England to make a reputation than to lose one. I wrote four 'Children's books,'

containing altogether, I suppose, 70,000 words…I wanted to escape from them as I had once wanted to escape from Punch…In vain. England expects the writer, like the cobbler, to stick to his last."[53]) Alternatively, scholars such as Alison Lurie have attributed the difference between the two Pooh books to Milne's regretful realization that his fantasy world must come to a close, while Ellen Tremper challenges this notion by asserting instead that the stories' humor—which is often aimed at adults—allows the grownup reader to appreciate the inevitable loss of childhood inexperience.[54] (Tremper thus points out: "It seems to me no accident that it should be Eeyore who opens the subject of education and knowledge, for witty Eeyore [who was *never* a child] is the most adultly humorous of the animals."[55]) According to these interpretations, which have become critical commonplaces within the canon of Milne studies, one might expect that the author's two most famous literary works differ only as a result of the author's changing temperament rather than any serious alterations in his philosophical outlook.

Of course, such an understanding of Milne's writing is necessarily incomplete: as I demonstrate in what follows, the author's thoughts concerning the philosophies of language and learning in fact evolved to a notable degree during this period, and it is to this final aspect of the author's interest in epistemological thought that I turn in the present section. Specifically, I propose that the type of community-building featured in *Winnie-the-Pooh* offers an important framework for understanding *The House at Pooh Corner*, which portrays formal education as at once threatening and integral to the formation of ideally democratic communities. Unlike its predecessor, moments of attempted meaning-making or storytelling in Milne's second collection

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[53] Milne, *Autobiography*, 286.

[54] Alison Lurie, "Back to Pooh Corner," *Children's Literature* 2 (1973): 16.

[55] Ellen Tremper, "Instigorating Winnie the Pooh," *Lion and the Unicorn* 1, no. 1 (1977): 44.

are often punctuated by the intrusion of rote learning and other ineffective modes of pedagogy. At the very start of the book, for example, Christopher Robin asks the narrator for a story about Pooh, a request that the latter quickly diverts with the following question: "What about nine times a hundred and seven?"[56] These interruptions produce endless divisions within Milne's fantasy forest community, frequently by highlighting the inhabitants' differences in formal knowledge: Owl fumbles through pretentious-sounding words as usual, but Eeyore and Rabbit can be heard grumbling on multiple occasions about the idea that the other animals "haven't got brains," while even Piglet and Pooh whisper to each other about the ways in which Rabbit's clever Brain explains "why he never understands anything."[57] As these moments and others throughout the narrative suggest, *The House at Pooh Corner* is very much concerned with balancing the socializing functions of everyday language use, on the one hand, with the productive but potentially isolating experience of formal education, on the other hand. These concerns (as I have noted briefly) in turn position *The House at Pooh Corner* at the center of important debates concerning the need for freer education systems that emerged in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Dewey was perhaps one of the most fervent and well-known proponents of such a system. In *Democracy and Education* (1916), he famously delineates the need for more progressive education systems by advocating the cultivation of democratic habits in all members of a given society. For Dewey, one of the most pressing issues faced by philosophers of education is the tenuous balance between what he calls "incidental" and "intentional" modes of education:

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[56] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*.

[57] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 295.

When the acquiring of information and of technical intellectual skill do not

influence the formation of a social disposition, ordinary vital experience fails to gain in

meaning, while school, in so far, creates only "sharps" in learning—that is, egoistic

specialists. To avoid a split between what men consciously know because they are aware

of having learned it by a specific job of learning, and what they unconsciously know

because they have absorbed it in the formation of their characters by intercourse with

others, becomes an increasingly delicate task with every development of special

schooling.[58]

According to Dewey, the creation of a formal schooling system that would supplement one's

everyday social interactions and cultivate more specialized knowledge also risks becoming

hierarchical. In order to resolve this difficulty, Dewey details a vision for the improvement of

formal education based on the "democratic ideal," which is defined by two fundamental criteria:

the representation of all members' mutual interests in a given social group, and the full freedom

with which this group interacts with other communities.[59] It is only by achieving such a balance

through proper education, he maintains, that both an individual and society can continue to grow,

cohere, and prosper.

This is not, of course, at all the type of ideal educational model that we initially find in

Milne's second collection of Pooh stories. From Eeyore's haughty expostulation on writing to

Christopher Robin's isolated contemplations on his multiplication tables, it is clear that Milne

associates his characters' existing attitudes toward formal learning with divisiveness and a

tendency toward antisocial behaviors. One particularly striking example of this alienation

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[58] Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 10-11.

[59] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 115.

occurs—perhaps unsurprisingly—through Eeyore, whose sudden obsession with status and education only exacerbates his marginalization within Milne's society. During a visit to Christopher Robin's house at the beginning of *The House at Pooh Corner*, for instance, the donkey reflects on the thoughtlessness of his animal friends: "They haven't got Brains, any of them, only grey fluff that's blown into their heads by mistake, and they don't Think, but if it goes on snowing for another six weeks or so, one of them will begin to say to himself: 'Eeyore can't be so very much too Hot about three o'clock in the morning.'"[60] Eeyore's quickness to dismiss the others based on their perceived lack of intelligence—or what he calls "Brains"—is both humorous and historically compelling. Whereas this word is used exclusively as a form of endearment in *Winnie-the-Pooh* (Christopher Robin lovingly calls his umbrella-boat "The Brain of Pooh," while Rabbit tells Pooh kindly at one point: "You haven't any Brain"), Eeyore's use of the term in Milne's sequel is overwhelmingly pejorative and positions him squarely within a contemporaneous debate concerning the correlation between the child's mental and neurological development.

In the decades immediately preceding the publication of Milne's Pooh stories, the research of well-known English neurophysiologists such as Charles Scott Sherrington had drawn increasing attention to the human brain by studying the ways in which synaptic communication between neurons operated.[61] As these discussions became more widely accepted, scholars in other academic communities began to focus on the function of the brain as well, among them the

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[60] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 177.

[61] C.U.M. Smith, "The 'Hard Problem' and the Cartesian Stand in British Neurophysiology: Huxley, Foster, Sherrington, Eccles," in *Brain, Mind, and Consciousness in the History of Neuroscience*, ed. Smith and Harry Whitaker (New York: Springer Dordrecht, 2014), 256-57.

rising ranks of educationalists whose job it was to develop improved curricula for British youths. In 1900, for instance, N.C. MacNamara published an article in the *Westminster Review* titled "The Human Brain in Relation to Education," which stressed the hereditary nature of brain development and maintained that a deeper understanding of these mental qualities would lead to more effective applications of pedagogy as well. "To know human nature we must study man; and this principle applies with much force to the training of the young," the author concluded. "Consequently those who undertake the education of young persons should be conversant with all that science can teach them regarding the physical and mental properties of human beings," especially concerning the "development…of certain specialized brain-centres."[62] This discourse surrounding the brain and education (which was typical of pedagogical discussions throughout the first decades of the twentieth century) is in many ways exaggerated through Eeyore's dismissive remarks about his peers, which repeatedly overemphasize the biological component of individual development. By drawing attention constantly to the supposed physiological deficiencies of Pooh and the other forest animals (whose heads are filled with "only grey fluff"), Eeyore becomes a caricature of the developmental biologist who cannot view his friends' intelligence except through their constitutive parts.

But Eeyore, as it turns out, also has a fairly plausible (if not entirely good) explanation for his shortsighted snobbery. Halfway through the book, Milne reveals that the gloomy donkey is in fact the only animal character that has been exposed to any formal schooling, even though the "Education" that he receives at the hands of Christopher Robin is obviously abbreviated and inadequate. In a chapter titled "In Which Rabbit Has a Busy Day, and We Learn What Christopher Robin Does in the Mornings," Piglet stumbles across Eeyore staring at what appears

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[62] N.C. MacNamara, "The Human Brain in Relation to Education," *Westminster Review* 154, no. 6 (1900): 634-40.

to be an arrangement of three sticks on the ground. Their subsequent conversation consists of an uneasy exchange about the nature of modern-day formal learning:

"Do you know what this is?"

"No," said Piglet.

"It's an A."

"Oh," said Piglet.

"Not O, A," said Eeyore severely. "Can't you *hear*, or do you think you have more education than Christopher Robin?"

"Yes," said Piglet. "No," said Piglet very quickly. And he came closer still.

"Christopher Robin said it was an A, and an A it is—until somebody treads on me," Eeyore added sternly.

Piglet jumped backwards hurriedly, and smelt at his violets.

"Do you know what A means, little Piglet?"

"No, Eeyore, I don't."

"It means Learning, it means Education, it means all the things that you and Pooh haven't got. That's what A means."[63]

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[63] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 251-52.
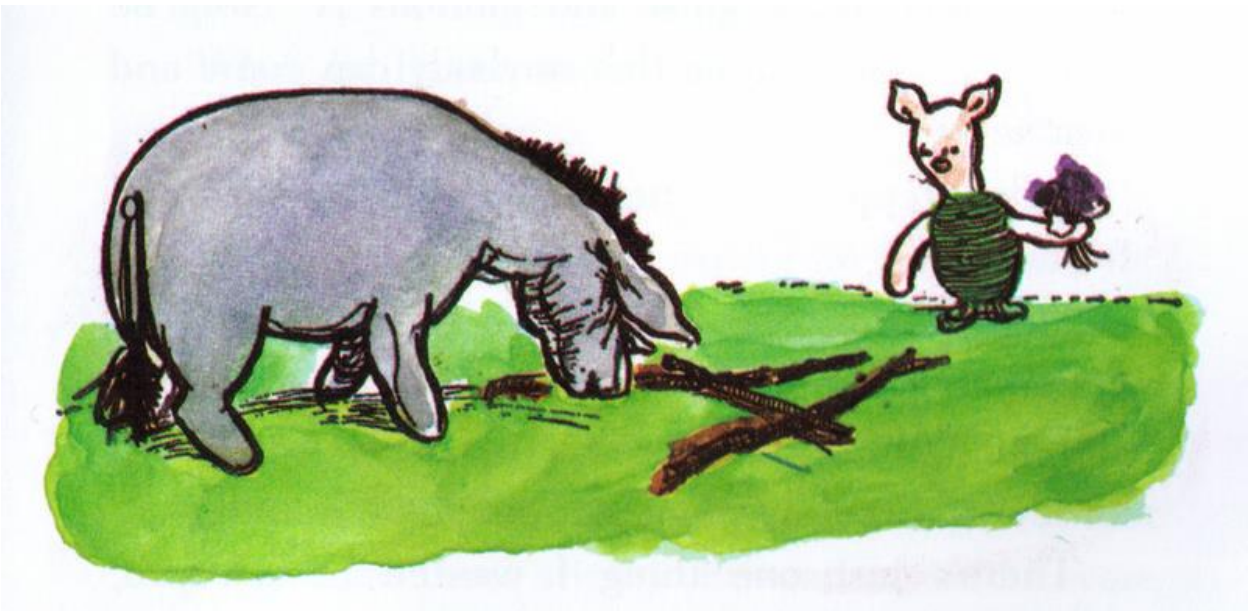
Figure 3.4. Eeyore and his "A."[64]

In this scene, Milne makes a comical but clear critique on outdated notions of education expressed by individuals such as Eeyore: the tendency for schools to overstress the importance of rote memorization and trivial details (including spelling) was of course characteristic of most elementary and secondary schooling during this period, though more progressive pedagogical techniques were slowly supplementing such traditional practices. (The educational model proposed by Italian educator Maria Montessori at the turn of the century offers one prominent example of this shift toward freer, more constructive approaches to pedagogy.) As Dewey noted with mild frustration in *Democracy and Education*: "Why is it, in spite of the fact that teaching by pouring in, learning by a passive absorption, are universally condemned, that they are still so entrenched in practice? That education is not an affair of 'telling' and being told, but an active and constructive process, is a principle almost as generally violated in practice as conceded in

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[64] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 251.

theory."[65]

But Eeyore remains firmly rooted in a mode of antiquated, anti-Deweyan thinking: Eeyore's obsession with the letter "A" once again suggests that he is incapable of viewing education as more than the sum of its parts. Instead, the donkey insists on the erroneous belief that learning is defined not through an entire process of growth, but rather by the acquisition of a particular piece of knowledge. By failing to view the concept of education within its larger social context, however, Eeyore engages in what British philosopher Gilbert Ryle calls "the category mistake," or the idea that one "represents the facts of mental life as if they belonged to one logical type or category (or range of categories), when they actually belong to another."[66] According to his narrow understanding of education, Eeyore mistakes a phonetic and written tool for facilitating literacy—a single letter—for an entire system: "To the Educated—mark this, little Piglet—to the Educated, not meaning Poohs and Piglets, it's a great and glorious A," he declares to his nervous friend. Here as in several other instances throughout Milne's narrative, Eeyore's readiness to transform his ostensible knowledge into a mode of exclusion is perhaps comedic— but it also illuminates the author's ongoing concern with the problematic systems of formal education that characterize life in his animals' fantasy forest.

It is this problematic impulse toward the stratification of literacy and learning that brings Milne's stories most closely in dialogue with the educational writings of Russell, who—apart from his treatises on the philosophy of logic and language—was also an ardent proponent of school reform. In a work titled *On Education, Especially in Early Childhood*, Russell advocates for a more open and democratic general approach to schooling, much in the same vein as Dewey.

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[65] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 46.

[66] Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Routledge, 2009), 6.

In a notable departure from his predecessor, however, Russell expresses a degree of skepticism about unqualified democracy in education, arguing that some cases required the firm (but just) hand of authority. In the case of children, for example, he demonstrates that parents much teach with a sense of justice and "adaptable tact," by which he means an ability to respond according to the situation rather than according to any rigid set of rules.[67] Along the same lines, Russell recognizes that members of any given society will tend to adopt a "herd instinct," or a natural desire to please by assimilating with the opinions and emotions of a surrounding group. He observes, by extension, that while increased freedom is the ultimate goal of his philosophy of educational reform, there remain instances in which it would be wisest for individuals to defer to authoritative precedent: "The great discoverers," Russell writes, "have had to withstand the herd, and incur hostility by their independence. But the average man's opinions are much less foolish than they would be if he thought for himself."[68] In the end, however, Russell concedes that although the majority of individuals' activities must be cooperative, this cooperation should not be blind; rather, he argues, a society based on truly democratic education is contingent on the cultivation of independent thought under the right circumstances. He thus concludes his chapter on the aims of education: "Nevertheless, we should all learn to be able to think for ourselves about matters that are particularly well known to us, and we ought all to have acquired the courage to proclaim unpopular opinions when we believe them to be important."[69]

These last ideas—concerning the need for individual difference in the midst of communal effort and interest—offer a vital solution to the difficulty that Milne first encounters when he

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[67] Russell, *On Education, Especially in Early Childhood* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1926), 121.

[68] Russell, *On Education*, 63.

[69] Russell, *On Education*, 64.

introduces elements of formal education into *The House at Pooh Corner*. For Russell's theory

suggests that what makes a system of "Learning" such as Eeyore's so problematic is not so much

a lack of common-feeling as a lack of curiosity: the donkey's inability to question the reasons for

what he has learned (namely, a single letter that is useless to him in isolation) prevents him from

contributing or communicating this knowledge back to the community in any meaningful way.

At the end of the earlier episode of reading, Eeyore is thus utterly disgusted at even the mention

of "thinking" after he learns that Rabbit shares his ability to read the first letter of the alphabet:

> "Clever!" said Eeyore scornfully, putting a foot heavily on his three sticks.

> "Education!" said Eeyore bitterly, jumping on his six sticks. "What *is* Learning?" asked
> Eeyore as he kicked his twelve sticks into the air. "A thing *Rabbit* knows! Ha!"

> "I think—" began Piglet nervously.

> "Don't," said Eeyore.

> "I think *Violets* are rather nice," said Piglet. And he laid his bunch in front of
> Eeyore and scampered off.[70]

In this moment, Eeyore's scornful injunction to his friend ("don't") highlights—with startling

clarity—the donkey's refusal to think critically about the very systems in which he presumes to

participate. This brand of elitism reveals a surprisingly nasty side associated with Eeyore's

"Education," which is not only socially divisive but also antithetical to the free-thinking

democratic ideals of formal learning outlined by Russell and other progressive educational

reformists. And of course, underscoring all of these concerns is Milne's cleverly placed

mathematical joke about the inescapable irony in such a flawed understanding of education: as

Eeyore jumps in anger on his now meaningless letter "A," the three sticks multiply from three to

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[70] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 254.

six to twelve, doubling in a cruel parody of reciting one's multiplication tables. Even the donkey's attempt to reject "Learning" as merely "a thing *Rabbit* knows," it seems, must result in a reiteration of that mindless system—a system, moreover, that cannot be escaped so long as it is defined by such narrow and inflexible thinking as Eeyore's.

As the narrative progresses, however, the donkey's conception of what it means to learn undergoes an important shift as well, thanks in large part due to an unpopular but very truthful opinion—voiced at last by Rabbit—about Eeyore's social responsibility and role within the forest's broader systems of education. After an episode in which Owl's tree has been blown over by a storm, Rabbit pays Eeyore a visit and asks him to help their friend search for a new house, at which the donkey complains:

> "Nobody keeps me Informed…No Give and Take," Eeyore went on. "No Exchange of Thought: '*Hallo—What'*—I mean, it gets you nowhere, particularly if the other person's tail is only just in sight for the second half of the conversation."
>
> "It's your fault, Eeyore. You've never been to see any of us. You just stay here in this one corner of the Forest waiting for the others to come to *you*. Why don't you go to *them* sometimes?"
>
> Eeyore was silent for a little while, thinking.
>
> "There may be something in what you say, Rabbit," he said at last. "I must move about more. I must come and go."
>
> "That's right, Eeyore. Drop in on any of us at any time, when you feel like it."[71]

In contrast to his earlier interruption of Piglet, Eeyore's fixation here on the free "Exchange of Thought" raises an important point concerning the nature of ideal education in Milne's forest. As

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[71] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 314-15.

Dewey points out, no democratic model of learning can exist without first encouraging this open flow of ideas between independent thinkers: "To be a recipient of a communication is to have an enlarged and changed experience," Dewey writes. "Nor is the one who communicates left unaffected. Try the experiment of communicating, with fullness and accuracy, some experience to another…and you will find your own attitude toward your experience changing."[72] Faced with the prospect of total social ostracization, Eeyore suddenly realizes that his continued self-isolation will also prevent him from achieving the very type of "Education" that he once (erroneously) believed set him apart from his fellow friends. At last, it seems, Rabbit's gentle remonstrance that meaningful discussion requires mutual effort enables the donkey to overcome his elitist biases and expand his views to include the social elements that cultivate meaningful education. By openly recognizing for the first time that he cannot both complain about a lack of "Give and Take" and consider himself too far above his peers to hold formative conversations with them, Eeyore finally comes to appreciate the value in the kind of universally accessible system envisioned by educational reformists such as Dewey.

In this sense, Eeyore also becomes—at least by the end of Milne's stories—an unlikely emblem of progressive twentieth-century pedagogical thought, one that successfully transitions from a rigid conception of formal language and education to a much broader understanding of what it means to generate meaningful thought through others. His ability to adapt finally to the demands of a social world such as the forest is both significant and redemptive: if Eeyore seems to be the narrative's most marginalized character, Milne makes it clear here that such an individual is also best situated to internalize the types of changes that will ultimately allow the forest to flourish into a more open, democratic space. For it is this surprising ability to adapt to

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[72] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 6.

dynamic philosophies of thought, epistemology, and pedagogy in particular that sets the donkey apart from characters such as Pooh (who has always been open-minded) or Owl (who remains blithely unaware to the last that he is a pedant at all). Unlike them, Eeyore demonstrates a delayed but crucial capacity to change with respect to learning: his relationship with education, though imperfect, enables Milne to examine previously unexplored avenues for enacting the type of gradual educational reform envisioned by thinkers such as Dewey and Russell. As the latter reflects: "Progress should not be sacrificed to a mechanical equality at the present moment; we must approach educational democracy carefully, so as to destroy in the process as little as possible of the valuable products that happen to have been associated with social injustice. But we cannot regard a method of education as satisfactory if it is one which could not possibly be universal."[73]

It is this emphasis on the possibility of universal progress, too—progress that occurs through each individual's shifting relationship with existing educational categories and structures—that renders Eeyore's final interaction with Rabbit so significant in Milne's overarching framing of *The House at Pooh Corner*. Through this widened channel of communication, Eeyore epitomizes the idea that inclusivity in the Pooh stories begins at the level of democratic change. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Milne's literalization of linguistic paradigms such as "The King of France" or "Winnie-*ther*-Pooh" exposes both the humor and the arbitrariness that inform processes such as language acquisition, which often evolve according to the consensus and (mis)interpretation of a given community of speakers. From the discussions surrounding ordinary language in "Teddy Bear" to the shifting functions of proper names in *Winnie-the-Pooh*, Milne makes it clear that semantic systems are meaningful only when

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[73] Russell, *On Education*, 17.

participants are forced to reconsider constantly their own relationships with language and (by extension) with one another. In his sequel, Milne's treatment of formal literacy goes further by suggesting that communal knowledge must not be blindly accepted by its participants, as Eeyore was willing to do with his reading of the letter "A," but rather productively interrogated and openly democratized at every level. In this regard, the Pooh stories together address one of the fundamental limitations shared by prominent philosophers of Milne's day: namely, these stories are willing to imagine the practical forms and often unexpected deviations that emerge when abstract theories of language and epistemology become translated into the realm of literary narrative.

There are issues, of course, that remain apparently unresolved in Milne's conclusion of his writing for children, the most notable of which is Christopher Robin's departure from the forest at the end of *The House at Pooh Corner*. The young boy, who confides in Pooh that he's "not going to do Nothing any more" because he must leave behind Milne's fantasy world for a world of formal schooling, strikes a nostalgic chord here that Lurie and other scholars have described as regretful and even bitter. [74] (As Lurie puts it: "It is Education that will, by the end of *The House at Pooh Corner*, have driven Christopher out of his self-created Eden."[75]) Yet to understand this moment of outward expansion as reluctant rather than filled with possibility is to misunderstand the fundamental structure of Milne's Pooh stories, which are not interested in merely perpetuating a static and carefree image of the forest and its inhabitants. Rather, these works continue to recalibrate important intellectual debates about what it might mean to create a democratic, socially-minded world of literacy and language—what it means, moreover, to use

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[74] Milne, *Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 342.

[75] Alison Lurie, "Now We are Fifty," *New York Times Book Review*, 14 November 1976.

literary fantasy as a means of cognizing the endless possibilities of meaning-making that cannot be encompassed in theory alone. Given this framework, Christopher Robin's departure represents not so much an abandonment of childhood imagination and communities as it does the potential to bring these ideas to life in a world beyond the pages of a children's storybook. Although there is certainly a feeling of wistfulness that accompanies this final scene, Milne suggests that these stories nonetheless bridge the worlds of make-believe and reality, offering a new conception of communication and communality that is truly democratic as long as it continues to be reconsidered in inclusive, open-minded ways.

In this sense, Milne's interest in the democratization of meaning-making usefully anticipates another important twentieth-century writer, one whose vision for accessible education and world order shifts Milne's focus to the much broader stage of global politics. While E.B. White's two best-known novels for children—*Stuart Little* (1945) and *Charlotte's Web* (1952)—are very much concerned with the impossible scales of literacy and democracy, I demonstrate in the following chapter that they process these concerns with a much more pronounced sense of expansiveness than Milne does. Specifically, White places these ideas in dialogue with contemporaneous wartime and postwar debates about the need for cosmopolitanism, or a view that privileges every individual (or country) as equal collaborators in the emerging postwar world order, regardless of their unconventional size or status. As we shall see, the impulse toward increased empathetic collaboration that characterizes Milne's stories becomes magnified under the scrutiny of White, who shares, however, much of the same interrogative spirit and democratic impetus that lie at the heart of both *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*.

Chapter 4

One World: Cosmopolitanism in Miniature and the Politics of Writing

in E.B. White's *Stuart Little* and *Charlotte's Web*[1]

Unlike A.A. Milne, whose reputation as an eclectic writer was eclipsed almost immediately by the success of his *Pooh* stories in the 1920s, American author E.B. White is perhaps as well remembered now for his nonfiction essays as he is for his children's novels. In 1942, Irwin Edman claimed that White "is our finest essayist, perhaps our only one," while a later reviewer, Spencer Brown, went even further with his praise: "White has been our preeminent essayist so long that many would say there is no other. If you want to know what the modern informal essay is, you must read *One Man's Meat* or *The Second Tree from the Corner* or *The Points of My Compass*."[2] The three collections of essays and short stories that Brown cites here form a core part of White's extensive writing career, which ranged from humor and light verse to children's novels. From 1925 to 1976, White helped establish a unique voice for the *New Yorker*'s then-emerging "Notes and Comments" section as well, a column that featured personal essays on an assortment of topics, from thoughtful contemplations on the crowded New York cityscape to much weightier reflections on a post-war world that had just begun to realize the full—and terrifying—potential of its atomic power. "Some say this is the beginning of a great time of peace and plenty, because atomic energy is so fearsome no nation will dare unleash it," White once wrote in a piece that was published on 18 August 1945, mere weeks after the United

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[1] The original version of this chapter first appeared as an article in *Lion and the Unicorn* 40, no. 1 (2016): 22-38.

[2] Irwin Edman, "Earthy, Humorous, Accessible," *New York Herald Tribune Books* 9 (14 June 1942): 2; Spencer Brown, "Review: The Odor of Durability," *Sewanee Review* 86, no. 1 (1978): 146-47.

States had dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively, in order to end decisively the Second World War. The essayist concluded with a caution to his readers: "The argument is fragile. One nation (our own) has already dared take the atom off its leash, has dared crowd its luck, and not for the purpose of conquering the world, merely to preserve liberty." [3] Haunted by the destruction wrought by the deadliest conflict in human history, White became an outspoken advocate for cultivating a more understanding and egalitarian world order, a vision that would continue to resonate throughout his wartime and postwar writings.

Apart from these periodical publications, White also cultivated a reputation for himself as a master of form and language. Among the best-known of his contributions in this regard is *The Elements of Style*, an American English style guide originally composed by William Strunk Jr.—White's professor at Cornell—in 1918 and significantly expanded upon by White in 1959. "Omit needless words," the title of chapter seventeen enjoins the reader; "Be clear," the heading of another chapter simply instructs.[4] This book, which remains a cornerstone in classroom curricula and modern studies of English language usage, in many ways epitomizes White's longstanding interest in the art of effective writing. As an author of three novels for children, White certainly took his own advice to heart in practice as well: *Stuart Little* (1945), *Charlotte's Web* (1952), and *The Trumpet of the Swan* (1970) all share a distinct style of writing that Herbert Mitgang praises as "singular, colloquial, clear, unforced, thoroughly American, and utterly beautiful… He was impervious to literary, intellectual and political fashion. He was ageless, and his writing was

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[3] Erin Overbay, "Eighty-Five from the Archive," *New Yorker*, 7 June 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/books/double-take/eighty-five-from-the-archive-e-b-white (accessed 17 May 2017).

[4] William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 4th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), 5.

timeless."[5]

While White's lifetime writing career was characterized by an exceptionally lucid writing style, his works—including, I would argue, his novels for children—nevertheless brim with critical commentary on some of the most complex literary and political issues of his day. Although Peter Neumeyer lists the many "epical connotations" that ostensibly appear in *Charlotte's Web* (he points out that Mr. Zuckerman's first name is Homer and that "this seemingly slight children's story flows in the mainstream of Western literary tradition"), his attempt to contextualize White within a broader genealogy of intellectual thought fundamentally ignores—as most studies of White's novels for children have done—the urgency that makes these works such timely products of postwar American debates.[6] In his examination of White's career as an essayist, for example, Robert L. Root Jr. makes a fairly representative claim when he asserts that White's second children's novel "is indicative of the way [White] compartmentalized his interests in writing that his most personal work and greatest artistic achievement of this period was in a form so radically different from the editorial form in which he wrote every week."[7] Lucien L. Agosta, who claims to offer the first comprehensive study of White's three novels for children, further reinforces this dichotomous critical approach by oversimplifying the significance of a tiny but sophisticated protagonist such as Stuart Little. This liminal character, according to Agosta, is "particularly satisfying to child readers who are introduced to a character as new to the world as they are but who, unlike them, is able to live in a world fully and to

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[5] Herbert Mitgang, "E.B. White, Essayist and Stylist, Dies," *New York Times*, 2 October 1985.

[6] Peter Neumeyer, "What Makes a Good Children's Book? The Texture of *Charlotte's Web*," in *Critical Essays on E.B. White*, ed. Robert L. Root Jr. (New York: G.K. Hall, 1994), 75.

[7] Robert L. Root Jr., *E.B. White: The Emergence of an Essayist* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 132.

negotiate his often difficult way in that world without the many limitations consonant with childhood."[8]

By refusing to conceive of White's fiction for children as contiguous with his broader concerns as an essayist and serious thinker, studies such as these overlook the pressing political engagement of works such as *Stuart Little* and *Charlotte's Web*, which grapple constantly with postwar discourses surrounding cosmopolitanism and globalization. As Helene Solheim once observed of White's diverse writing career: "There is nothing in his children's stories inconsistent with or unlike the substance of his articles or essays or poems for adults…Rather than being incidental," the author's writing for children "is central to White's work."[9] In this final chapter, I raise the possibility that the unusual world view held by Stuart Little, on the one hand, and the type of understated writing practiced by a quiet leader such as Charlotte, on the other hand, are in fact inseparable from White's overt interests in a postwar vision for global democracy. "One of the results of having a vision of the whole," Clifton Fadiman observes in a 1945 article that appeared in the *New York Times Book Review*, "is that Mr. White is forced to see the part for exactly what it is."[10] By applying this type of rescaled viewpoint to his children's novels, White in fact foregrounds repeatedly the need to create a unified world: one world, specifically, that can learn to overcome its fragmented differences of perspective in order to celebrate a shared vision for a more cosmopolitan future.

In the first half of this chapter, my analysis focuses on White's mouse-like protagonist

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[8] Lucien L. Agosta, *E.B. White: The Children's Books* (New York: Twayne, 1995), 31.

[9] Helene Solheim, "Magic in the Web: Time, Pigs, and E.B. White," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (1981): 390.

[10] Clifton Fadiman, "In Praise of E.B. White, Realist," *New York Times Book Review*, 10 June 1945, 12.

Stuart, who occupies a peculiarly scaled perspective that allows him to see New York City in a way that remains inaccessible to most other inhabitants of the metropolis. These moments of microscopic scrutiny place Stuart in dialogue with an essay of White's—titled "Here is New York" (1949)—that examines the unique plight of a city caught between constant expansion (growth of the cityscape) and contraction (loss of space through overcrowding). I assert that Stuart's tininess, coupled with the broadening world view of his bird friend Margalo, enables him to see both the metropolis and world around him with exceptional clarity, and in doing so to appreciate better the value of every perspective, regardless of size or power. This cosmopolitan vision offers a particularly compelling link to White's essays on global government, which were later collected in *The Wild Flag* (1946) and reveal the extent to which White's political thought becomes a significant influence on his first children's novel.

In the second half of this final chapter, I propose that *Charlotte's Web* offers a modified and substantially more haunting version of the hopeful cosmopolitanism that first appeared in *Stuart Little*. As my analysis demonstrates, this postwar work is entrenched in discussions about rural routine, staticity, and the perpetuation of violent traditions such as the mindless slaughter of pigs—discussions, moreover, that White had considered at length four years prior in his well-known essay, "Death of a Pig" (1948). These problematic acts of violence, however, also generate a new ideal of democratic leadership in White's novel: unlike the dogmatic strategy that Stuart adopts when he advocates for a world built on cosmopolitan outlooks, the spider Charlotte's status as a writer, thinker, and largely unseen communicator grants her a position of newfound privilege within White's narrative. Through both public and private acts of writing, Charlotte persuades an entire community to halt its destructive traditions of annual slaughter, and in doing so offers a new model for facilitating the kind of cooperative global order that White

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envisioned in a postwar world.

1. A City and World in Miniature: The Scale of Perspective in *Stuart Little*

There has always been something about the implausible scale of White's protagonist

Stuart Little that has stretched the limits of believability, even to the author himself. Although

the eponymous protagonist of *Stuart Little* belongs to a human family, he looks "very much like

a mouse in every way"—"wearing a gray hat and carrying a small cane," according to White's

humorously matter-of-fact narrator.[11] As a result of his unusual size, Stuart embarks on a series

of uniquely scaled adventures throughout New York City and the countryside, commandeering

toy sailboats in Central Park and flying over the metropolis with a beautiful bird named Margalo.

He also engages, however, in tasks that initially appear unrelated to his size: at one point, he

even leads an invigorated, authoritative classroom discussion about what it would mean to be

Chairman of the World. The at-times random structure of the novel has prompted critics such as

Roger Sale to dismiss the book as "terribly bored during many of its episodes"; meanwhile,

Malcolm Cowley has also observed with disappointment that "the parts of *Stuart Little* are

greater than the whole."[12] Yet as I argue here, there is a way of understanding how Stuart's size-

based relationship to these episodes creates a narrative of wholeness, one that constantly

recalibrates the relationship between scale and value. In the first part of his city adventures, for

example, Stuart's unconventional view of the world brings the loftiness of New York City

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[11] E.B. White, *Stuart Little*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1973), 1-2.

[12] Roger Sale, *Fairy Tales and After: From Snow White to E.B. White* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 258; Malcolm Cowley, "Stuart Little: Or New York through the Eyes of a Mouse," *New York Times*, 28 October 1945, http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/lifetimes/white-little.html (accessed 17 May 2017).

repeatedly under his microscopic scrutiny. Whether he spends his time examining miniature

coins on the bus or admiring model sailboats at Central Park, Stuart's unconventional point of

view constantly works to transform a sublime (and potentially terrifying) urban encounter into an

accessible, aesthetically valuable experience. As the story progresses, Stuart learns to expand his

miniature vantage point, adopting the bird's-eye view of his friend Margalo and traveling

through the vast countryside in pursuit of her after she flies away.

These scenes of transformation and rescaled perspective of course augment White's

interest in the relationships among childhood, fantasy, and the miniature: as I have noted in my

introduction, Marah Gubar observes that many scholars automatically tend to associate "the trials

and tribulations of miniature heroes with the plight of children, who must also navigate a world

built to a scale that exceeds their size."[13] But while White's protagonist certainly engages the

fantastic literary conventions of miniature heroes such as Tom Thumb or Arriety, Stuart's

expanding desire to explore New York, scour the countryside in search of Margalo, and even

become a global leader suggest that White conceives of smallness as much more than a metaphor

for childhood tribulations. In what follows, I maintain that Stuart's smallness, together with his

global ambition, actually stands in dialogue with the nonfiction prose that White wrote for the

New Yorker and other periodicals during World War II and the immediate postwar period. Much

like the first half of Stuart's metropolitan adventures, White's essays on New York City

(including his most famous piece, "Here Is New York") are centrally concerned with perspective

and scale in urban space. In a statement that resonates with White's representations of the city in

Stuart Little, he describes New York as a place that is "characterized by physical majesty,"

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[13] Marah Gubar, "Species Trouble: The Abjection of Adolescence in E.B. White's *Stuart Little*," *Lion and the Unicorn* 27, no. 1 (2003): 98-99.

making it the "loftiest of cities."[14] White's nonfiction writings of this period also share a vocabulary that connects the loftiness of New York with a distinctly global perspective. In his 1940s political essays, White refers to New York City as "a world government on a small scale" and discusses the urgent need to create a federalized, cosmopolitan postwar world government.[15] White's vision of a global federation certainly informs Stuart's desire to play-act as Chairman of the World, since he is a tiny leader who respects the value of every perspective regardless of the owner's size or perceived power.

If, in White's essays, New York City serves as a metropolitan synecdoche for imagining government on a global scale, then Stuart's ability to experience his surroundings from both miniaturized and holistic perspectives is critical to understanding White's political thought. Concentrating on the continuity between *Stuart Little* and White's essays elucidates the former as a surprisingly cohesive, politically informed narrative, since Stuart's unconventional size enables White to examine the city through an imaginative, fantastic perspective that he could not have achieved through his nonfiction alone. By challenging size-based binaries of perspective and value, Stuart's narrative therefore stresses the ways in which simultaneous encounters with smallness and largeness—and by extension, shared local and global environments—are critical to understanding (and even restoring) the scales of immensity, fragility, and beauty of a postwar world.

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[14] E.B. White, "Here is New York," in *Empire City: New York Through the Centuries*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson and David S. Dunbar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 700.

[15] E.B. White, *Wild Flag: Editorials from* The New Yorker *on Federal World Government and Other Matters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946), xii.

White's preoccupation with size and beauty, both in the city and beyond it, would appear throughout his writing career in various guises. In "Here Is New York," White offers a poetic, humanistic, and at times gritty (though never pessimistic) view of the metropolis after World War II. Meyer Berger, a journalist for the *New York Times*, aptly captures popular sentiment when he observes that the work is "a miracle of literary compactness that misses none of the City's color, or flavor, or changing mood."[16] As the essay unfolds, White's Cold War fears about the city become evident; he remarks on the fragility of a place that "to a New Yorker…is both changeless and changing," and concludes that "the city has never been so uncomfortable, so crowded, so tense."[17] Throughout, White implies that New York is caught between simultaneous contraction and expansion, between physical immensity and minute detail. Like the protagonist of *Stuart Little*, the city's inhabitants are constantly dwarfed by lofty cityscape. Even so, in White's view the metropolis' geographical density enables New Yorkers to experience this sublimity at a microcosmic level as well.

It is this recurring concern with the relationship between scale and world perspective that characterizes White's 1945 fictional rendering of New York City. Stuart's New York is a place that operates in a delicate equilibrium between largeness and smallness, constant growth and contraction. Most notably, his unique perspective allows him to see even the tiniest, most mass-produced things in a non-standard and aesthetic light. In one early episode, Stuart attempts to pay a bus conductor with his very own diminutive, homemade dime. Like the tiny dime, Stuart—who

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[16] Meyer Berger, "Crystal-Clear New York," *New York Times*, 18 December 1949, http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/lifetimes/white-newyork.html (accessed 17 May 2017).

[17] White, "Here is New York," 708-9.

is neither a human boy nor a mouse—belongs metaphorically to the wrong currency in a fully-sized human world. The bus conductor therefore remarks with some surprise: "Why, you're no bigger than a dime yourself," to which Stuart replies scathingly that he is certainly "more than twice as big as a dime."[18] By resisting the conductor's attempt to categorize him according to a fixed notion of size and worth, Stuart reassesses the meaning of standardized value and offers an alternative axiology: attention to detail. According to the narrator, Stuart's tiny coins are "no bigger than the eye of a grasshopper"—nevertheless, they are "handsome little things, although rather hard to see without putting on your spectacles," and beautiful objects in their own right.[19] In this case, resizing serves as a portal for reimagining value, since Stuart's miniscule viewpoint enables him to witness the details of New York City from an entirely non-normative, revitalizing perspective that appreciates the value of nonstandard scales.

In the chapter that follows, Stuart arrives at the sailboat pond in Central Park, and again he encounters a miraculous sort of beauty in miniature that might easily go unnoticed. This time, however, White's narrator invites the reader to juxtapose her perspective against Stuart's: "Some of the toy boats were not as small as you might think," the narrator remarks, "for when you got close to them you found that their mainmast was taller than a man's head, and they were beautifully made, with everything shipshape and ready for sea."[20] Here, he raises the possibility that the reader takes certain scales of perspective for granted, and skillfully draws her into Stuart's miniaturized view by prompting her to examine its more minute dimensions. On the one hand, Stuart experiences this beautiful moment as a direct consequence of his size and ability to

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[18] White, *Stuart Little*, 95.

[19] White, *Stuart Little*, 29.

[20] White, *Stuart Little*, 31.

perceive details that would otherwise be overlooked in an oversized city. On the other hand, the reader seems only lucky enough to have caught a glimpse of this miniaturized beauty before it becomes Stuart's privileged viewpoint once more; as soon as the moment passes, the narrator shifts from the second-person address back to the rather more opaque third-person omniscience. Such moments as this one suggest that beauty waits hidden in every corner of this vast metropolis—but even when it can be found in the details of the city, to the untrained onlooker it is often as fleeting as it is wonderful.

A deepening complexity of vision concerning beauty and size, however, emerges at this point in the novel, when Stuart first meets a small hen-bird named Margalo. In a February 1974 letter, White describes Margalo as Stuart's "ideal of beauty and goodness": "As you grow older you will realize that many of us in this world go through life looking for something that seems beautiful and good—often something we can't quite name." He adds to the addressee: "If the book made you cry, that's because you are aware of the sadness and richness of life's involvements and of the quest for beauty."[21] Margalo—a symbol of fleeting beauty—briefly visits the Littles before flying away to the north during the springtime. Margalo's beauty enables Stuart to broaden his miniaturized perception of the metropolis by encouraging him to practice the type of holistic urban gaze that White believes energizes metropolitan experience in "Here Is New York." "New York is nothing like Paris," White explains in his essay. "It is nothing like London; and it is not Spokane multiplied by sixty, or Detroit multiplied by four. It is by all odds the loftiest of cities. It even managed to reach the highest point in the sky at the lowest moment of the depression."[22] To White, the metropolis is a place that cannot be fully comprehended, "the

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[21] E.B. White, *Letters of E.B. White*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 603.

[22] White, "Here is New York," 700.

visible symbol of aspiration and faith, the white plume saying that the way is up"—in short, the sublime embodied seamlessly in an urban landscape. In addition:

> "[The city] compresses all life, all races and breeds, into a small island and adds music and the accompaniment of internal engines. The island of Manhattan is without any doubt the greatest human concentrate on earth, the poem whose magic is comprehensible to millions of permanent residents but whose full meaning will always remain illusive."[23]

For White, the intersection of poetry with the almost explosive diversity of Manhattan manifests itself as an inspiring but illusive contradiction. In theory, New York City's compressed population leaves very little room for the roaming imagination; it invokes music and poems, but only if they are accompanied by the roaring of "internal engines" that keep the factories running and hands working. A shared, dwarfed vantage point prevents city dwellers from grasping the full significance of mid twentieth-century New York's expansive poeticism. Confronted with the "greatest human concentrate on earth," the population experiences urban space as a blur of empty categories ("races," "breeds," "all life") rather than as a large city defined collectively by millions of distinct individuals or stimulating details. Even when the metropolis teems with "magic" and an "illusive" quality, the source of this energy derives not from local New Yorkers (those "permanent residents" who constitute the great human concentrate), but rather from the displaced stranger: "Commuters give the city its tidal restlessness; natives give it solidity and continuity," the author concedes, adding firmly, "but the settlers give it passion."[24] According to White, the outsider alone possesses the potential to decompress the cityscape and its inhabitants, to unveil the illusory nature of New York's poeticism by viewing it clearly as well as

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[23] White, "Here is New York," 700.

[24] White, "Here is New York," 698.

holistically. As a consequence, Margalo—the key outsider in Stuart's narrative—complements rather than simply transforms the protagonist's existing miniature perspective on the city by offering him a larger (if not sublime) one as well. Beyond seeing the world through the miniature, Margalo reminds Stuart that he can discover beauty in enormousness as well as tininess, and (more often than not) one through the other.

Garth Williams' memorable illustrations for the first edition of *Stuart Little*, which HarperCollins has continued to preserve in its reprints of the book, draw important visual attention to this point. It is no accident that Williams' only illustration depicting the city as a whole appears in Margalo's final interaction with Stuart, during which she prevents a garbage stow from dumping him into the Atlantic Ocean. In the picture, the city constitutes a vague blur of ascending rectangles representing high-rises and towers; the dark, turbulent waves of the ocean engulf the entire bottom half of the drawing, while a bridge between the island and mainland is only just visible in the far background.[25] This New York differs significantly from the city Stuart glimpses in overwhelming bits and fragments, in terms of parts, pant legs, and park ponds: this is New York as Margalo sees it from her literal bird's-eye view, an entire urban space with no trace of its former impenetrable sublimity. "I can already see the towers and chimneys of New York," she informs Stuart as they fly back to the Little household, thus reducing the potentially overwhelming metropolis to a series of more manageable building blocks that make up the enormous whole.[26] Unlike Stuart, who sees beauty in the tiniest details—and even more unlike the millions of disillusioned inhabitants who can never truly grasp New York's full meaning—Margalo offers Stuart a new vantage point from which to experience

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[25] White, *Stuart Little*, 63.

[26] White, *Stuart Little*, 64.

the city and world. In doing so, however, the bird also makes it impossible for Stuart to live in

New York City any longer.

Figure 4.1. Garth Williams' illustration—view of New York City from above.[27]

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[27] White, *Stuart Little*, 63.
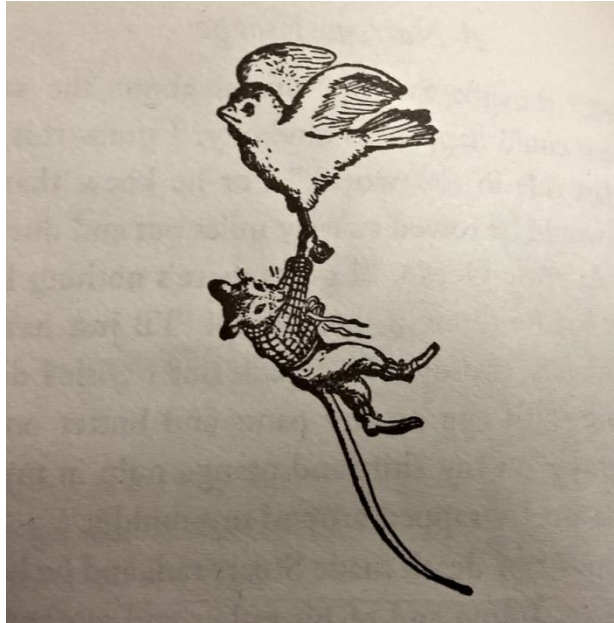
Figure 4.2. Margalo takes flight above the city with Stuart, who looks down.[28]

By the next chapter, Margalo has flown away from the Littles' household, and shortly

thereafter a heartbroken Stuart sets out after her, determined to search for the fleeting beauty and

liberating macrocosmic vision of New York that she has come to represent. As Stuart steals

quietly out of the house in pursuit of her, the narrator observes: "Stuart stood uncertainly for a

moment in the street in front of the house. The world was a big place in which to go looking for a

lost bird. North, south, east, or west—which way should he go?"[29] The accompanying

illustration shows a tiny figure—only just visible in the lower left of the picture—nearly lost

below rows of towering apartment buildings and an obtrusive, sprawling tree that covers most of

the foreground. White frequently used trees as symbols of growth and perspectival change in his

published essays: in "Here Is New York," for instance, the author alludes to an old willow

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[28] White, *Stuart Little*, 62.

[29] White, *Stuart Little*, 75.

located near Turtle Bay that "symbolizes the city: life under difficulties, growth against odds."[30] In 1947, White also published a short story called "The Second Tree from the Corner," which deals explicitly with the relationship between perspective and scale, and in many ways reinforces Stuart's broadening perspective once he leaves New York.

This fictional piece relates the story of a man named Mr. Trexler who, plagued by bouts of anxiety and possible insanity, regularly visits an unnamed psychiatrist. As the sessions continue, Trexler develops the ability to adopt the perspectives of the various characters he encounters: "Whenever he got into a cab, he instantly became the driver, saw everything from the hackman's angle…saw everything—traffic, fare, everything—through the eyes of Anthony Rocco, or Isidore Freedman, or Matthew Scott."[31] Everything becomes a matter of mutable perspective, until the protagonist is so immersed in others' viewpoints that he actually begins to assume the interrogative role in his conversations at the psychiatrist's office. Toward the end of the essay, however, Trexler experiences a renewing epiphany about what has been missing from all of the perspectives through which he has seen the world: "What he wanted was at once great and microscopic...'I want the second tree from the corner, just as it stands,' he said, answering an imaginary question from an imaginary physician. And he felt a slow pride in realizing that what he wanted none could bestow, and that what he had none could take away."[32] It is Trexler's desire for that which is "at once great and microscopic" that sets him apart from the story's other monotonous characters, who remain blind to both the tiny details and greatness of the metropolis they inhabit. For Trexler, the second tree from the corner symbolizes the most desirable balance

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[30] White, "Here is New York," 711.

[31] White, *The Second Tree from the Corner* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 100.

[32] White, *Second Tree from the Corner*, 102-3.

of scale-based perception: this tree simultaneously invites minute examination ("saturated with the evening, each gilt-edged leaf perfectly drunk with excellence and delicacy") and expands this minuteness into something of much larger proportions, something representative of the city in its entirety.[33]

If we understand White's writing as a continuous process, then Trexler's ability to perceive scale with such astounding clarity usefully elucidates the ways in which the fantasy scales of greatness and littleness complement one another in *Stuart Little*. Margalo ultimately enables Stuart to see the macrocosmic as the ideal accompaniment to microscopic beauty; in this sense, even a mouse-sized protagonist can embody the spirit of New York's simultaneous enormousness and minuteness. More important, by reaching this new understanding of scale as a fluid rather than binary system, the novel begins to recalibrate not only its aesthetics of size, but also the possible political dimensions of size in a worldwide economy. In particular, Stuart's movement beyond the dense city into the expansive countryside blurs the line between the local and the global. By the same logic, Stuart's littleness in the latter half of the novel is not only locally significant, but also globally influential in ways that resonate with White's political writing of the period. By turning to a collection of White's wartime *New Yorker* essays on global federal government, *The Wild Flag*, we can begin to see the specific brand of politics that informs Stuart's experiences of an expanding world.

Expanding World View: A Miniature Global Leader

In the second half of *Stuart Little*, the protagonist's departure from New York allows

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[33] White, *Second Tree from the Corner*, 102.

Stuart to enter the enlarged territory of White's wartime global politics. The chapter that most clearly foregrounds this outward shift is "The Schoolroom," which playfully and humorously engages the subject of world government. On his journey to find Margalo, Stuart encounters a school principal who cannot find a teacher for one of his classes; the principal glumly observes: "There's nobody in this town who knows anything; no spare teachers, no anything."[34] Stuart volunteers for the job and quickly wins the class's admiration by skipping arithmetic, spelling, and writing altogether; instead, he decides to lead an invigorated discussion about what it would mean to act as Chairman of the World. Suddenly, global politics replace New York City as the novel's subject of focus: "The world gets into a lot of trouble because it has no chairman," he declares to the room. "I would like to be Chairman of the World myself"—to which one of his students, Mary Bendix, dismissively replies: "You're too small." Stuart, however, defuses her prejudicial remark with a simple retort: "Size has nothing to do with it. It's temperament and ability that count."[35] By refusing to allow smallness to determine the value of his governance, Stuart establishes a crowning principle for successfully federalizing a postwar world: to entrust world leadership to the everyman rather than the largest or most powerful nation. As White emphasizes in a 1943 essay: "In the United Nations of the World there will be no foreigner to make fun of, no outsider to feel better than. A citizen of the U.N.W. must take pride in the whole world; that, for some people, is going to be a very large thing to get excited about."[36] In order to unite such a "very large thing" as the entire world, however, every citizen must first acknowledge the need for a truly worldwide democracy.

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[34] White, *Stuart Little*, 85.

[35] White, *Stuart Little*, 92.

[36] White, *Wild Flag*, 10.

As these moments demonstrate, in both his nonfiction and fictional prose White advocates a globally-minded community that erases selfish desires of national sovereignty and concentrates instead on mutual recognition of shared interests. In his essays, White is constantly absorbed by the idea of microcosms and their ability to reveal fundamental truths about the expanding, borderless world that contains them. "Every day the importance of being fantastic becomes clearer," White declares in one essay. "It does not seem a bit too fantastic to us that the people of this small world should indulge themselves in a common government."[37] White's reference to "the importance of being fantastic" anticipates his mouse-like protagonist, whose story bridges the real world with the realm of fantastical fiction. That Stuart is "little" while the world is "small" is therefore not a contradiction of size: rather, this overlap exposes the idea that preconceptions based on scale, for White, are relative rather than fixed. By extension, the intersection of scale-based fantasy and reality allows the author to imagine what it might mean to become a citizen of a "small world," with a literal-mindedness that his nonfiction alone could not achieve.

Under Stuart's diminutive but holistic guidance, therefore, all perspectives—no matter how tiny or unconventional—rapidly become valid subjects for discussion within the classroom. When one student suggests creating a law to "never poison anything but rats" because "rats are objectionable," Stuart points out fairly, and with an eye for the underrepresented: "From a rat's point of view, poison is objectionable. A Chairman has to see all sides to a problem."[38] When the student asks if he has a rat's point of view, Stuart adds: "I have more the point of view of a

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[37] White, *Wild Flag*, 34.

[38] White, *Stuart Little*, 93-94.

mouse, which is very different. I see things whole."[39] This statement functions in part as the author's joke about the arbitrariness of labels, but Stuart's assertion more seriously rejects the distinct categories of wholeness and tininess. In place of this binary, Stuart advocates a comprehensive rubric that views the miniature and the global as inseparable, an opinion that first found its voice in White's *The Wild Flag*. Samuel Zipp argues that White's essays from this period "simultaneously upended then-current ideas about world government with a model of cosmopolitanism that stressed global connection through rather than over and against local particularity"; according to Zipp, the author emphasized the need for "a new public founded in global realization of shared feeling for locality."[40] Stuart's simultaneous tininess and broad-mindedness thus make him a unique representation of the local and global, perfectly scaled to lead a community-driven vision of cosmopolitanism.

Historically, Cowley has suggested that the schoolroom episode is "an effective fable about the San Francisco Conference" that gathered all of the nations and was supposed to establish a postwar world government—specifically, the United Nations.[41] Though optimistic, White felt increasingly disappointed by the results of the conference and continued to express his discomfiture in his fiction as well as his *New Yorker* essays: "Almost everything you see and hear in San Francisco is an affirmation of the absolute state, a denial of the world community," he writes in *The Wild Flag*. "The flags, the martial music, the uniforms, the secret parley, the delicate balance, the firm position, the diplomatic retreat. Ninety per cent of the talk is not of

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[39] White, *Stuart Little*, 94.

[40] Samuel Zipp, "Raising The Wild Flag: E.B. White, World Government, and Local Cosmopolitanism in the Postwar Moment," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4, no. 1 (2012): 3.

[41] Cowley, "Stuart Little," 68.

how people shall be brought together but of the fascinating details of how they shall be kept apart. And under all is the steady throbbing of the engines: sovereignty, sovereignty, sovereignty."[42] This is the political dimension that Stuart engages when he introduces possible laws for effectively running the world. White later reflected, however, that although "most of the stuff in 'The Wild Flag' is all right as far as it goes…it was written prior to 1945. In 1945 it became apparent, in San Francisco, that the dream of coming out of a world war into a more orderly state of affairs was being knocked into a cocked hat."[43] It was in that year of disillusionment that White notably published *Stuart Little*. This historical and literary intersection suggests that the schoolroom chapter not only resonates with the San Francisco conference and its global conversations, but also symbolizes White's attempt to reclaim the ideals of a truly worldwide community through the local and the familiar: through, specifically, a miniature facilitator.

By bringing this vast, globally-minded conversation specifically into a classroom, Stuart revalues littleness and rescales the educational space, capitalizing on his young students' positive outlook in order to create the novel's arguably most intimate and cosmopolitan environment. White is particularly interested here in children's collective gift for "solving things directly, easily, and sometimes brilliantly" because their minds are untainted by the prejudices of adulthood, and therefore best-suited to fostering a space of equality.[44] In one essay titled "Children," for instance, the author recalls a story in which two groups of schoolchildren—"one predominantly colored, one predominantly white"—play a game of Race Riot together. As soon

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[42] White, *Wild Flag*, 81.

[43] White, *Letters of E.B. White*, 327.

[44] White, *Wild Flag*, 66.

as the groups assemble, however, they realize that there are "more white boys than colored boys." The simple solution both astonishes and impresses White: "Like a flash the children had the answer. The proper number of white boys promptly volunteered to play colored, and the race riot proceeded with even numbers, in perfect equality. Adults, we feel, would have had the devil's own time with a situation like that."[45] The youth of Stuart's students—like Stuart's size—is an asset rather than a handicap, since their undeveloped vantage point empowers them to see "the important things" in life: "A shaft of sunlight at the end of a dark afternoon, a note in music, and the way the back of a baby's neck smells if its mother keeps it tidy" are all things that one student, Henry Rackmeyer, names as important in life (*Stuart Little* 92). Although Henry's response appears almost comically overwrought for its poeticism, it fits well in Stuart's discussion about Chairman of the World: the reply further emphasizes the disparity between his students' collective knowledge and the conference members' evasive conversation about relinquishing national sovereignty.

For White, smallness and youth in *Stuart Little* thus serve as analogous (rather than metaphoric) political indicators of democratic responsibility. In many ways, the classroom scene revises the critical platitude that Stuart's smallness is a straightforward exploration of childhood's liberating potential, in which the tiny protagonist's adventures represent the child's struggle to overcome her own littleness. (Patricia Wiles, for example, reinforces this critical commonplace when she reminisced in 2000 how the book showed her as a young reader that "no person is too small to have big adventures!"[46]). Views such as Wiles's unfortunately oversimplify Stuart's tiny stature into a metaphor for childhood, when in fact White skillfully

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[45] White, *Wild Flag*, 67.

[46] Patricia Wiles, "Advice from Stuart Little," *Writer* 113, no. 5 (2000): 5.

integrates Stuart's size into broader conversations about the necessity for a responsible, inclusive world government. White thus concludes in one *Wild Flag* essay: "It does not seem a bit too fantastic to us that… a Britisher, a Portuguese, and a Hollander should live under the same bill of rights."[47] Stuart interacts at various moments with Albert Fernstrom (which resembles a Swedish family name), Anthony Brendisi (quasi-Italian), Harry Jamieson (perhaps Scottish or Irish), and Agnes Beretska (likely Polish)—as well as children with prototypically American or English names: for instance, Lydia Lacey, Elizabeth Gardner, and Marilyn Roberts. White makes such a conscientious effort to integrate these diverse characters that the classroom's global demographic appears surprisingly representative—a place White conceives of as a microcosm for an inclusive world order, much like the United States (which White regarded as "a sort of world state in miniature").[48]

This pivotal scene justifies the conclusion of "The Schoolroom" which—though it appears sentimentally nostalgic by comparison—urgently reminds the reader of what is at stake in establishing a democratic world government under the leadership of an unlikely chairman such as Stuart. The dreamy idea of summertime—one of White's favorite topics, about which he writes extensively in his private letters—sends the fierce Chairman of the World into a blissful reverie about young love and delightful seasonal memories.[49] After commanding one student to

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[47] White, *Wild Flag,* 34.

[48] White, *Wild Flag*, 72. White's full quote, taken in context, reads as follows: "The United States is regarded by people everywhere as a dream come true, a sort of world state in miniature. Here dwell the world's emigrants under one law, and the law is: *Thou shalt not push thy neighbor around*."

[49] In the introduction to his collected letters, White characteristically reminisces about the formative role that summertime played during his childhood: ""For me the golden time of year was summertime, when we all went for one month to a rented camp on the shore of Great Pond, one of the Belgrade Lakes, in Maine…This Belgrade era began, I think, in 1904, when I was five

break two laws experimentally by stealing another student's "little tiny pillow stuffed with sweet balsam," Stuart grows noticeably eager to acquire the small pillow for himself.[50] He asks the owner, Katharine (who notably shares a first name with White's spouse): "I suppose it was given you by a boy you met at Lake Hopatcong last summer, and it reminds you of him…You're sure you wouldn't want to sell that pillow?"[51] In the end, despite Stuart's longing, he defers to Katharine's decision to keep her pillow, thus demonstrating the importance of preserving peace and upholding right over wrong, and of choosing principle over supremacist desire. "Don't know as I blame you. Summertime is important," he remarks quietly, by way of a just concession. Stuart's actions echo an observation White published about fundamental human goodness in April 1945: "By some curious divinity which in him lies, Man, in this experiment of mixed races and mixed creeds, has turned out more good than bad, more right than wrong, more kind than cruel, and more sinned against than sinning. This is the world's hope and its chance. The Senator is right—when you have fluidity and justice, the people get on all right."[52] Stuart, in his liminal mouse-like state, is not only the embodiment of fluidity and justice; he is a protector of it as well, a tiny but powerful advocate for a world that should "never forget [its] summertimes."[53]

    These final reflections set the tone for the remainder of the novel, in which White

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years old. It was sheer enchantment. We Whites were city people—everything about Belgrade was a new experience: the big fresh-water lake, the pines and spruces and birches, the pasture with its sweet-fern and juniper" (*Letters of E.B. White*, 8). Notably, White compares his summertime experiences at the lake with his usual life in the city, retrospectively anticipating their shared centrality throughout his writing career.

[50] White, *Stuart Little*, 95.

[51] White, *Stuart Little*, 98.

[52] White, *Wild Flag*, 72-73.

[53] White, *Stuart Little*, 98.

transitions away from his overt political commentary in order to resume Stuart's inconclusive search for Margalo who, like summertime, is as "perfectly beautiful" as she is ephemeral[54]. The description of Ames' Crossing (the first town Stuart visits on his northward journey), with its flowing, lengthy prose, formally emulates the boundlessness of a world Stuart is exploring now for the first time:

> In the loveliest town of all, where the houses were white and high and the elm trees were green and higher than the houses, where the front yards were wide and pleasant and the back yards were bushy and worth finding out about, where the streets sloped down to the stream and the stream flowed quietly under the bridge, where the lawns ended in orchards and the orchards ended in fields and the fields ended in pastures and the pastures climbed the hill and disappeared over the top toward the wonderful wide sky, in this loveliest of all towns Stuart stopped to get a drink of sarsaparilla.[55]

At first, the narrator deliberately delays the subject of the sentence (Stuart, drinking sarsaparilla) in order to stress the intricate details of this "loveliest of all towns," with its endless elm trees and yards and streets.[56] Then, as the sentence unfolds, these minute details rapidly expand and become part of a rolling, limitless landscape where streams and pastures and orchards disappear "toward the wonderful wide sky"—a space characterized by a language of unassuming, natural vastness both similar to and separate from New York's earlier largeness. Threading together the entire sentence is the preposition "where": its soothing repetition creates an effect of gradual expansion wherein it becomes impossible to separate each part from the whole. The world, it

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[54] White, *Stuart Little*, 103.

[55] White, *Stuart Little*, 100.

[56] White, *Stuart Little*, 100.

seems, has finally left behind the miniature in order to embrace that which is global and broad, leaving the reader with a sense of unbounded pastoral in this new landscape. But this is not entirely true, either. At the end of the sentence, the narrator abruptly resizes these sweeping images with a jolt back to the miniature: for all the built-up anticipation, the only event that occurs at the conclusion of this beautiful sentence is that Stuart stops to get a drink of sarsaparilla. The contrast between the town's eloquent description and Stuart's trivial action is characteristic of White's writing, which frequently defies readers' expectations about tonal congruence in order to generate humor. More to the point, however, this juxtaposition draws into focus once again the tiny protagonist, whose small size successfully anchors the narrative's broadening perception of the world.

Moving ahead, the novel's conclusory passage is therefore neither lofty nor overly philosophical, but hones in on Stuart's journey specifically: "As he peered ahead into the great land that stretched before him, the way seemed long. But the sky was bright, and he somehow felt he was headed in the right direction."[57] This ending follows Stuart's extensive conversation with a telephone repairman who (like the narrator in the description of Ames' Crossing) describes the world in vast, rolling terms: "Following a broken telephone line north, I have come upon some wonderful places…Swamps where cedars grow and turtles wait on logs but not for anything in particular."[58] By juxtaposing these two perspectives on the world—the repairman's poetically broad one and Stuart's forward-looking, focalized one—the narrative acknowledges the necessity of both world views, which are complementary rather than opposed to each other. As in Stuart's New York adventures, the two vantage points embody a paradox of perception, in

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[57] White, *Stuart Little*, 131.

[58] White, *Stuart Little*, 129.

which littleness becomes a point of entry for accessing the scales of this final, open-ended greatness. Perhaps Stuart's journey will continue to unfold beyond the novel's pages, but he remains appropriately at the center of the narrative in spite of its boundlessness. It is therefore fitting that, in a 1961 letter to Dorothy W. Sanborn, White defends Stuart's inconclusive journey using a vocabulary of largeness: "My reason (if indeed I had any)," he writes, "for leaving Stuart in the midst of his quest was to indicate that questing is more important than finding, and a journey is more important than the mere arrival at a destination. This is too large an idea for young children to grasp, but I threw it to them anyway. They'll catch up with it eventually."[59] In this sense largeness, for White, is a non-problem; for even young children, like Stuart, will find ways to "catch up with" large ideas in spite of—or perhaps because of—their littleness. This revalued lack of closure resounds with a hopeful idealism that could scarcely be overstated in the bleak wartime climate during which White wrote *Stuart Little*. What emerges from White's novel, letters, and essays alike is his steady belief in the process of discovery, interminable hope, and the importance of a constantly expanding world view as seen through the everyday or miniature. "Stuart's conversation, towards the end of the book…has something of the philosophy of *One Man's Meat*," Rosemary Benet keenly observes in a review of *Stuart Little*, likening the fictional book to White's essays for a monthly column that appeared in *Harper's Magazine* from 1938 to 1943. She concludes: "There is a matter-of-factness about all Stuart's adventures that keeps them from being too whimsical and that gives them substance and charm."[60]

More important, this matter-of-factness lends seriousness and political immediacy to the author's vision of a rescaled world. At last, *Stuart*'s vision of an ever-expanding city and the

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[59] White, *Letters of E.B. White*, 436.

[60] Rosemary Benet, "Mrs. Little's Second Son," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 8 December 1945.

world beyond it through fantastical tininess brings us full circle to the idea with which this essay began: that White's writing for children is significantly representative of (rather than separate from) the author's larger political and cultural vision. Through my examination of *Stuart Little* and several of his nonfiction prose essays, I have argued that understanding the author's writing as a continuous process is vital to parsing the complex, seemingly fragmentary structure of his first children's novel. In particular, the work's seemingly disjointed events allowed the author to renew the topics he was already discussing in his nonfiction prose—such as the beauty of New York and the scale of postwar globalism—through the defamiliarizing viewpoint of a miniscule protagonist. As a consequence, littleness is not merely incidental to the story or a representation of empowering childhood for the child reader, but a cultural and political phenomenon that exposes the beautiful, expansive potential of a wartime society. This view challenges Caroline C. Hunt's suggestion that Stuart may be a "different *kind* of being" who "does not possess the ordinary rights of humans." ("The possibility," she continues, "with its terrifying implications, lies behind many miniature hero stories and represents one of childhood's deepest fears. To be a child is, potentially, to be a nonperson.")[61] If anything, Stuart not only possesses the "ordinary rights of humans"; he also becomes an important, democratic advocate for these universal rights as well. By empowering littleness with the ability to foster both aesthetic possibilities and a shared global perspective, White revalues more than just size: he reconceptualizes unquestioning binaries of identity, perspective, and individual value as well. To claim that White created "miracles of literary compactness" throughout his career therefore aptly describes a writer who viewed individual perspective as a phenomenon that could be "both changeless and changing"—at once small and large, tiny and powerful, intimately local and undeniably global.

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[61] Caroline C. Hunt, "Dwarf, Small World, Shrinking Child: Three Versions of Miniature," *Children's Literature* 23 (1995): 122.

This holistic worldview, however, which largely persisted throughout White's lifetime, would become increasingly challenging for the author to envision as years of tense postwar global relations intervened. Seven years after the publication of *Stuart Little*, White struggled once again to articulate his vision and find a place for such democratic ideals in his second novel for children, *Charlotte's Web*. Much like Stuart, White's spider protagonist Charlotte—who is a skilled writer and leader—inhabits a world that is not scaled to fit her unusual size and status: in her quest to save a pig named Wilbur from slaughter, she must use her democratically-minded writing in order to interrupt the mindless, murderous rural routines that characterize the Zuckermans' farm. As we shall see, these attempts highlight White's concerns about the increasingly hostile political landscape of postwar America, which—in his view—could be rectified only through freer expression and a fundamental willingness to rethink critically the traditions in which we participate.

2. Rewriting Histories:

Rural Repetition and Scales of Writing in *Charlotte's Web*

Charlotte's Web begins where *Stuart Little* concludes: in a seemingly idyllic, intimate farm community set in mid twentieth-century America. Geographically removed from the traces of wartime concern and global influences that echo through the metropolitan narrative arc in *Stuart*, this novel draws heavily from the author's rural life in Maine, which—as White frequently attested in his later years—he preferred in many ways to the constant bustle of New York City. Unsurprisingly, many scholars have cited the author's self-professed contentment with countryside living as proof of the second novel's essentially pastoral, community-based,

and self-contained idealism. In his influential study of White's writing career, for instance, Root contrasts the novel with *One Man's Meat* (White's semi-autobiographical essays about Maine, first collected and published in 1942), in which "the author's rural routine…anchors the entries in an immediate, localized context, while his persistent concern with the world outside his community broadens it into something more than a regional book." [62] White's lifelong interest in the relationship between global and rural networks, according to this view, differs fundamentally from his fiction for children, the latter of which Mary Gould Davis called in her 1952 review "a story that will have for grownups as well as for children a curious fascination."[63]

As I have already suggested in my examination of *Stuart Little*, this critical tendency to treat White's periodical and fictional writings as discrete bodies of work with little to no serious thematic overlap deemphasizes the continuity that the author invested in all of his publications, regardless of their ostensible readerships. Far from compartmentalizing his work, I propose in the following that White uses realist fantasy in *Charlotte's Web* to reimagine those same concerns that he had previously—and very directly—articulated in nonfiction essays such as "Death of a Pig," in which the author must confront his own complicity in deceiving and raising a pig for the slaughter. As in White's essay, this novel (a narrative that centers around a pig named Wilbur and his unexpected arachnid friend, Charlotte) pits the problematic human desire for fleshly sustenance with the animal's competing desire (or is it a right?) to simply live life to the fullest. This work also focuses on a rural landscape that has fallen into manmade cycles of unproductive, unquestioning, and murderous routine: specifically, the ever-looming threat of Wilbur's death at the hands of male figures such as Mr. Arable, Mr. Zuckerman, and even a boy

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[62] Root, *E.B. White*, 132.

[63] Mary Gould Davis, "Review of Charlotte's Web," *Saturday Review* 35 (15 November 1952): 50.

named Avery. For a writer who often expressed dissatisfaction with the gap in public opinion between worldwide affairs and local experiences, this form of rural repetition evoked, at best, a sense of emotional isolation and lack of artistic vitality; at worst, it could even naturalize cycles of cold-blooded murder that, at several levels, mirrored eerily the accounts of apathy and death that followed even after the war.

By examining how the novel's construction of rural cyclicity resonates with the postwar tensions that White explored in his contemporaneous nonfiction, I suggest in the second half of this section that Charlotte's innovative reappropriation of the written word offers an unconventional, productive model for enacting change at both local and global levels. As the novel expands in scope, Charlotte's ability to reimagine the applications of certain cyclical traditions in which she participates (such as her ancestors' long history of web-weaving), coupled with the close aesthetic attention that she pays to her written messages, reveals a type of leadership that differs significantly from White's vision of world federation in *Stuart Little* seven years earlier. Unlike White's first novel, *Charlotte's Web* refuses to rely solely on outspoken global leaders or institutions such as the United Nations in order to foster international cooperation. Instead, White uses Charlotte to emphasize the critical role that private individuals can play in influencing public opinion, specifically in order to challenge preexisting beliefs about the value of individual life and protecting one's freedom of expression. Through its extended examination of Charlotte's rejuvenating potential, this novel therefore accentuates the need for a society mediated by critical thinkers who—most vitally of all—are capable of finding and sharing renewal in a seemingly stagnant Cold War world.

"In 'Charlotte's Web,'" White once reflected in a letter, "the spider dies. My editor at Harper's was not very enthusiastic about this development. Apparently, children are not supposed to be exposed to death, but I did not pay any attention to this."[64] The novel's beginning must not have done much to relieve editor Ursula Nordstrom's chagrin, either: if the opening scene foregrounds a single problem more strongly than any other, it is the sense that even the apparent bliss of rural living can be infected by the potentially violent symptoms of staticity and mindless cyclicity, in which othering a living being is enough to justify a longstanding tradition of slaughter. The first chapter of his narrative thus begins with the heartrendingly naïve words uttered by eight-year old Fern Arable—"Where's Papa going with that ax?"—as she enters a kitchen that will later be filled with the wafting smells of coffee and bacon.[65] Perry Nodelman explains how this moment affirms White's fundamental belief in the innocence and purity of children: "Fern saves Wilbur because she has *no* knowledge of the world, and because her father wants to keep her that way."[66]

Certainly, Fern's lack of knowledge prompts her to do what no adult in the novel would do—successfully intervene in the premature murder of a runt pig—but there is also a quality of undeniable worldliness in her articulation of this mindless injustice. While her mother and father attempt to assuage her with ineffectual statements of reassurance, the young girl repeats their thoughtless rhetoric in the form of demanding interrogatives: "Do *away* with it?" Fern shrieks,

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[64] White, *Letters of E.B. White*, 483.

[65] White, *Charlotte's Web* (New York: Harper, 1980), 1.

[66] Perry Nodelman, "Text as Teacher: The Beginning of Charlotte's Web," *Children's Literature* 13 (1985): 120.

echoing her mother's hollow euphemism in order to expose its latent cruelty. "You mean *kill* it?" Mr. Arable's entreaty to Fern to "control herself" likewise receives a scathing reply that bitterly pits his own words against him: "'Control myself?' yelled Fern. 'This is a matter of life and death, and you talk about *controlling* myself.' Tears ran down her cheeks and she took hold of the ax and tried to pull it out of her father's hand."[67] In this scene, Fern's ability to transform her parents' unthinking prejudices into a series of reframed questions forces Mr. and Mrs. Arable to consider, for perhaps the first time, the murderous traditions to which they subscribe on the farm. (The child's readiness to challenge her parents' assumptions about killing animals also foreshadows the type of productive, interrogative rhetorical reproduction that—as I suggest in the latter half of this section—Charlotte uses further on in the novel to save Wilbur's life.) As White once mused in "Here is New York," one of the unique problems of the countryside— unlike the city—was that there were only ever "a few chances of sudden rejuvenation—a shift in weather, perhaps, or something arriving in the mail."[68] Fern's reiterative questions, however, demand that her parents no longer take the elimination of a runty, troublesome pig for granted as a fact of farm life, but rather evaluate it critically as a shared concern about the value of individual life itself.

Yet with the exception of the dynamism that characterizes this opening scene, even Fern's bold intervention fails to effect much long-term change in the Arable household. Instead of coming to see Wilbur as a new member of the family, both the Arables and the broader countryside community insist on maintaining their thinly veiled murderous rhetoric with surprising tenacity throughout the novel, suggesting that for White, such rhetoric is systemic

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[67] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 2.

[68] White, "Here is New York," 698.

rather than particular to the Arable family. In her examination of edibility and ethics in

Charlotte's Web, Amy Ratelle explains that dehumanizing impulses such as Mr. Arable's are

more widely symptomatic of what Jacques Derrida calls the "carnophallogocentric" paradigm of

Western meat consumption, or a view of society that privileges the "human, male, meat-eating

individual" as the ideal subject.[69] According to Derrida, this individual is invested with the

authority to reenact constantly man's God-ordained dominion over animals, most notably

through the consumption of animal flesh by the adult male subject.[70] Perhaps this is why, when

an old sheep reveals the farmer's plans to butcher Wilbur for Christmas, her list of the co-

conspirators responsible for this scheme is an exclusively male-centered one: "Everybody is in

the plot," she assures the young pig. "Lurvy, Zuckerman, even John Arable"—to which Wilbur

responds hysterically: "Mr. Arable?…Fern's father?"[71]

The young pig's expression of surprise and betrayal, however, is incongruous with the

insatiable, selfish human hunger that Fern's father continues to express even much later in

Chapter Sixteen, when he remarks casually to Wilbur's new owner, a neighboring farmer named

Mr. Zuckerman: "It's hard to believe that he [Wilbur] was the runt of the litter. You'll get some

extra good ham and bacon, Homer, when it comes time to kill *that* pig."[72] Although many

circumstances have changed by this point in the story (most notably, Charlotte's miraculous web

writing has made Wilbur an extremely valuable presence on the Zuckermans' farm), Mr.

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[69] Amy Ratelle, "Ethics and Edibility in *Charlotte's Web*," *Lion and the Unicorn* 38, no. 3 (2014): 333.

[70] Jacques Derrida, "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," trans. Peter Connor and Avital Ronell, ed. Eduardo Cadava et al. in *Who Comes After the Subject?* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 114.

[71] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 49.

[72] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 126.

Arable's fundamental framework for thinking about Wilbur's life remains unchanged, exposing the pervasive deep-rootedness of his anthropocentric—and certainly carnophallogocentric—thinking. Instead, he linguistically denies Wilbur an individual animal subjectivity ("*that* pig") and in doing so is capable of continuing to view Wilbur as nothing more than "extra good ham and bacon," terms that deliberately separate the edible product from its original living source. As these various moments illustrate, Mr. Arable's ingrained comfort with killing for the sake of consumption is perhaps as dangerous as his inflexible lexicon for understanding his own relationship to another individual living being.

The pertinacity of such male-dominated lexicons, moreover, is problematic for White because it is generationally pervasive and repetitive, with the potential to create endless perpetuations of such violent transgressions. Nowhere is this more apparent in White's fiction than in the depiction of Mr. Arable's son, ten-year old Avery Arable, whose description resonates strikingly with much of the postwar criticism that White published while he was still conceptualizing *Charlotte's Web* in the early 1950s. Avery's appearance in the kitchen on the morning when Fern saves Wilbur's life dispels any pretense of the pure childhood benignity imagined by Nodelman: the boy emerges downstairs "heavily armed—an air rifle in one hand, a wooden dagger in the other," and his demands for a pig of his own—while not granted—convey his bellicose desire to assert his dominance over other living creatures.[73] On the one hand, the narrator's description evokes the romanticized image of a rugged frontier individualist, prepared to roam the wild countryside and explore its limitless potential. On the other hand (and more proximate to this narrative moment), the description echoes the alarmed discourse White used in 1945 to describe soldiers and wartime atrocity, which he criticized as "the broad general business

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[73] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 4.

of armed slaughter and destruction."[74] Private correspondences reveal that in 1952—the year *Charlotte* was published—the author felt increasingly ambivalent toward the Korean War, which (according to White's granddaughter) "both affirmed White's belief in the possibility of a world federation and shook him deeply."[75]

These double-edged concerns could not have been far from the author's mind as he continued developing and refining the character of Avery: for in spite of the wariness with which White's narrator treats the young boy, at certain points the novel still seems willing to explore—rather than blindly critique—Avery's violent behavior throughout the narrative. Perhaps the most prominent example of this ambivalence is Garth Williams' first illustration of Avery, which seems strangely incompatible with the narrator's description of Avery's untamed belligerence.

Figure 4.3. Avery holding his gun.[76]

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[74] White, *Wild Flag*, 62.

[75] White, *Letters of E.B. White*, 334.

[76] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 5.

In the drawing, Avery appears not in an aggressive attitude as one might expect, but rather as a stationary, almost startlingly subdued figure.[77] His unfocused eyes gaze at a point well beyond the page, implying a somberness and seriousness that seem ill-fitted to the vigorous play in which he otherwise engages throughout the narrative. His weapons, too—"an air rifle in one hand, a wooden dagger in the other"—appear less dramatic than the written account suggests; the young boy lets both armaments hang toward the floor, close to his body and in a clearly unthreatening position. If anything, the most striking aspect of this illustration is Avery's vulnerability: he is a far cry from the lively boy who will later make funny faces and act like a clown at the county fair in order to attract attention to himself.

Visually burdened (if only for a fleeting moment) by what it means to participate in traditional conceptions of masculine boyhood, this young figure affirms White's ambivalence toward a wartime culture that, in producing soldiers, often prematurely destroyed their vitality as well. Mrs. Arable's blithe analysis of her son's well-being is, in many ways, more destructive than Avery's actions alone: "Avery is always fine," she informs the family psychiatrist, Dr. Dorian. "Of course, he gets into poison ivy and gets stung by wasps and bees and brings frogs and snakes home and breaks everything he lays his hands on. He's fine."[78] The construction of Mrs. Arable's speech frames the mindless cyclicity of her thoughts: the intervening description between her repeated insistences—"Avery is always fine…He's fine"—reinforces the idea that she is reproducing rather than critically constructing a certain conception about what it means to be a thriving rural American boy. By situating this troubling construction of traditional masculinity in a fictional farm setting, White raises the question of whether such tautological

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[77] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 5.

[78] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 111-12.

lexicons for discussing normalcy could be sustainable—or indeed even desirable—in a postwar climate that refused to challenge its own standards for understanding violence.

These concerns were not unique to White's second novel either, though his fiction certainly enabled to explore them from a refreshing new perspective. Four years earlier, the author had in fact detailed his personal experience with raising a pig for slaughter, in a well-known nonfiction essay published in the *Atlantic* titled "Death of a Pig." This essay, which was based on White's time on his farm in Maine, illuminates the paradoxical modern circumstances that pitted manmade cycles such as premediated murder against organic ones such as natural—if unexpected and perhaps even painful—death. In the story, the writer recounts the illness and death of a pig that he had bought and been raising for meat:

> The scheme of buying a spring pig in blossom time, feeding it through summer and fall, and butchering it when the solid cold weather arrives, is a familiar scheme to me and follows an antique pattern. It is a tragedy enacted on most farms with perfect fidelity to the original script. The murder, being premeditated, is in the first degree but is quick and skillful, and the smoked bacon and ham provide a ceremonial ending whose fitness is seldom questioned. [79]

In his description, White focuses on three key elements of his experience: the almost mindless, methodical pattern of raising a pig for consumption; the deep-rooted familiarity of the scheme (which is usually performed "with perfect fidelity to the original script"); and the murderous meal of meat that this entire tragic performance ultimately produces. Taken together, these elements form a tradition that seems to exclude the possibility of questioning or change, in particular because White feels powerless to deviate from what he otherwise perceives to be a

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[79] E.B. White, "Death of a Pig," *Atlantic*, January 1948, 28.

murderous rite. As he observes in "Sootfall and Fallout," a 1956 *New Yorker* essay that strongly

critiques public apathy toward the postwar nuclear arms race: "You could drop a leaflet or a

Hubbard squash on the head of any person in any land and you would almost certainly hit a brain

that was whirling in small, conventional circles. There is something about the human mind that

keeps it well within the confines of the parish, and only one outlook in a million is

nonparochial."[80]

     This penchant for mindless, routinized behavior haunts White himself, who nevertheless

uses his position as a writer to advocate for creating a broader culture based on critical and

"unconventional" thought. On a local level, he insists, the smallness of minds trapped within the

confines of convention could reproduce endlessly cycles of "premeditated murder" such as the

intended slaughter of his pig. Perhaps even more urgently, however, such thinking was

responsible on a much broader scale for the general lack of public outcry against issues of

universal postwar concern, including the deadly effects of nuclear sootfall and fallout. White

criticizes this apathy and explains in the same essay that such ubiquitous complacency would

create a peculiarly grim type of global community: "I suspect that because of fallout we may

achieve a sort of universality sooner than we bargained for," he declares with characteristic

directness. "Fallout may compel us to fall in."[81] For White, the seemingly individualized

problem of small-mindedness actually constitutes a form of passive, global complicity: by

confining and stagnating minds at a local level, staticity would also continue to perpetuate a

wider culture of irresponsible behavior that relied on tradition rather than active change.

     No wonder, then, that the tenor of White's writing changes in "Death of a Pig" when his

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[80] E.B. White, *Essays of E.B. White* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 92.

[81] White, *Essays of E.B. White*, 95.

pig unexpectedly falls ill and disrupts the tradition in which he has long participated: suddenly, the author reflects, "the classic outline of the tragedy was lost…I had a presentiment, the very first afternoon, that the play would never regain its balance and that my sympathies were now wholly with the pig." Unable to resume his easy adherence to a routine that he has never fully questioned, the writer is torn between his newfound sympathy for the dying pig, on the one hand, and an overarching desire to return to the original script in which the pig is raised for slaughter without any disruption, on the other hand. "I wanted no interruption in the regularity of feeding, the steadiness of growth, the even succession of days," White notes with a mixture of wistfulness and guilt. "I wanted no interruption, wanted no oil, no deviation. I just wanted to keep on raising a pig, full meal after full meal, spring into summer into fall." Gradually, the author finds himself faced with another challenging realization as well: whereas the regularity, steadiness, and evenness of his animal interactions have heretofore allowed him to accept the eventual murder of the pig without a second thought, the natural death of the sick pig is painful precisely because it allows the writer to see the pig as it is for the first time: as an individual, living, suffering subject. He thus reflects of the whole experience: "The loss we felt was not the loss of ham but the loss of pig. He had evidently become precious to me, not that he represented a distant nourishment in a hungry time, but that he had suffered in a suffering world."

This acknowledgement of a pig's inherent subjectivity of course resonates—in ways both obvious and extraordinarily subtle—with the fictional pig that he would imagine only a few years later. Gerald Weales usefully summarized the relationship between "Death of a Pig" and *Charlotte's Web* by suggesting in a 1970 review that "since literature is not life, White set out in 'Charlotte's Web' to save his pig in retrospect, this time not from an unexpected illness but from

its presumably fated 'tragedy.'"[82] Here, Weales expresses a commonly accepted view of the close relationship between White's essay and novel, particularly in the alternate fates that each of the narratives' pigs ultimately face: White's real-life pig dies, while Wilbur lives. Yet the fantastic realism of *Charlotte's Web* not only allows White to "save his pig in retrospect," as Weale suggests: it also allows the author to examine rural staticity and murderous tradition from a perspective that is biocentric rather than anthropocentric in nature.

As in *Stuart Little*, the author aligns his narrative with an unlikely protagonist whose localized needs and problems, in fact, are much more wide-reaching than they initially appear. Wilbur, like the human characters who live in White's fictional countryside, also suffers from overdependence on manmade cycles and customs, which simultaneously lend him an illusion of predictability and enmesh him in a stagnant world without moral imperative, fellow-feeling, or desire for progression. The Zuckermans' farm, to which Wilbur is sold once he grows too large to stay with Fern, is a place characterized by completely barren repetition: indeed, the only mention of production on the farm is the narrator's passing observation, during the excitement following Charlotte's miraculous writing: "Mr. Zuckerman was so busy entertaining visitors that he neglected his farm work."[83] In his pen, Wilbur quickly grows "lonely and bored" with his repetitive life, having "no place to go but in" when he stands out in the yard and having "no place to go but out in the yard" when he is back indoors. He exists, according to John Griffith, in a "desperate existential situation: he is scared of dying; he faces *ennui*, and he is starved for

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[82] Gerald Weales, "The Designs of E.B. White," *New York Times Book Review*, 24 May 1970.

[83] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 84.

friendship and love." [84] Unlike Charlotte, whose sedentary lifestyle affords her "a chance to think" (as she informs the pig later in the novel), Wilbur's life is sedentary only because, in his words, "I have to hang around here whether I want to be or not."[85] This unending cycle of ennui is antithetical to the form of critical thinking that characterizes Charlotte's existence, as well as to the comforting, reliable routine that Wilbur and Fern share at the beginning of the book:

> Every morning, as soon as [Fern] got up, she warmed his milk, tied his bib on, and held the bottle for him. Every afternoon, when the school bus stopped in front of her house, she jumped out and ran to the kitchen to fix another bottle for him. She fed him again at suppertime, and again just before going to bed. Mrs. Arable gave him a feeding around noontime each day, when Fern was away in school.[86]

By internalizing the comforting routine that Fern initially offers, Wilbur inadvertently becomes a subject of modern human time and undergoes something akin to the distress that White experiences when he adheres too closely to convention in "Death of a Pig." In a chapter titled "Loneliness," the newly sold Wilbur has sunk into a mindless, isolated routine on the Zuckermans' farm: "Breakfast at six-thirty. Skim milk, crusts, middlings, bits of doughnuts…Breakfast would be finished at seven. From seven to eight, Wilbur planned to have a talk with Templeton…From eight to nine, Wilbur planned to take a nap outdoors in the sun"—

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[84] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 16; John Griffith, "Charlotte's Web: A Lonely Fantasy of Love," *Children's Literature* 8 (1980): 113.

[85] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 61.

[86] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 8.

and so forth, for over a page.[87] Wilbur's predilection for timekeeping seems more fitting for the

mid twentieth-century city, where clocks dictated virtually every second of every day, than for a

remote farming community. Moreover, unlike agricultural time, which according to Martin H.

Levinson "did not have to be calibrated to the minute" and therefore allowed rural inhabitants a

certain measure of freedom, Wilbur's schedule is absolute—and, as it turns out, absolutely

repetitious.[88] He does not desire freedom—indeed, he explicitly rejects it when he escapes from

his pen and willingly returns for the slops that Mr. Zuckerman pours into his trough—but instead

seeks to maintain (if ineffectually) a sense of control over an otherwise lonely, isolated existence

through meticulous attention to his routine.

Surprisingly, however, Wilbur's ineffective attempt to supplant Fern's presence with

strict temporal regulation also results in one of the novel's most rejuvenating reflections on the

nature of nothingness and repetition. In a subsequent episode, his circular reasoning allows him

for once to become a producer of thought, one whose circularity is reinvigorating rather than

merely reiterative. When a neighboring lamb disdainfully informs Wilbur that "pigs mean less

than nothing," the latter replies with astonishing alacrity:

> "What do you mean, *less* than nothing? I don't think there is any such
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> thing as *less* than nothing. Nothing is absolutely the limit of nothingness. It's the
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> lowest you can go. It's the end of the line. How can something be less than
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> nothing? If there were something that was less than nothing, then nothing would
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> not be nothing, it would be something—even though it's just a very little bit of
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> something. But if nothing is *nothing*, then nothing has nothing that is less than *it*

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[87] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 25.

[88] Martin H. Levinson, "Time-Binding Time: A History of Time-Measurement and Time-Management in America," *ETC.: A Review of General Semantics* 61, no. 1 (2004): 9.

is."[89]

Formally, Wilbur's thoughts attempt to transform static repetition (represented through his twelve reiterations of the word "nothing") into a form of productive cyclicity, a "something—even though it's just a very little bit of something." The circular nature of his speech, however, contrasts with the fundamental linearity of his thoughts as well: three times in quick succession, Wilbur invokes the idea of nothingness's finite nature, since for an inexperienced pig such as himself nothing is simply "the limit," "the lowest," "the end of the line." Of course, as the narrative gradually reveals, and as Wilbur must learn (with the births of Charlotte's children after the spider dies) nothing is not in fact waiting at the end of the line. For White, Wilbur's conscious employment of language and thought in this early moment opens up the future possibility of achieving a new perspective through critical reflection, which in turn can cut through the cycles of regimented manmade nothingness that characterize his current lifestyle.

In particular, the circular thoughts that he expresses here anticipate the renewing potential of the novel's premiere thinker, writer, editor, and questioner: Charlotte the spider. As I suggest in the following section, the sense of cyclical rejuvenation that accompanies Charlotte's writing—as well as her ultimate masterpiece, her death and the birth of her children—presents a hopeful alternative to a rural community that exists in a state of unproductive staticity. By positing Charlotte as the ideal individual who can foster democratically-minded change and (more important) cultivate a sense of shared consciousness through her art and writing, White offers a vision of global postwar renewal that can be achieved only through unfettered thought and expression.

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[89] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 28.

As the narrative's premiere writer, thinker, and questioner, Charlotte is the individual that White most strongly associates with revival and meaningful creation. While she acknowledges the inevitability of certain natural cycles such as her own eventual death and the birth of her children, she also readily challenges those manmade traditions—including but not limited to the butchering of spring pigs—that would prematurely truncate these cycles with violence. Nowhere is this more apparent than shortly after her introduction to the story, when an old sheep bleats out that she sees "the same thing, same bold business, year after year. Arable arrives with his .22, shoots the…" The sheep is interrupted by Wilbur's panicked shrieks as the latter realizes his intended fate, but Charlotte—who expresses her annoyance at this remark—nevertheless remains a voice of reason throughout the ordeal. Barely making herself heard over what she calls the pig's "hysterics," the spider promises to save Wilbur's life, a fact that instantly sets her apart from the other members of the barn, who remain complacent observers of Wilbur's anguished fate.

As I demonstrate in this section, Charlotte's acknowledgement of the value of Wilbur's individual life, coupled with her sharp outburst at the lack of thought that human characters invest in their murderous traditions ("what people don't think of!"), positions her as an ideal advocate of freedom from mindless or conventional thinking. "To be free, in a social sense, is to feel at home in a democratic framework," White wrote in a 1940 essay for *One Man's Meat*. "[Adolf Hitler's] feeling for men is not that they co-exist, but that they are capable of being arranged and standardized."[90] Unlike the men who view one another with impassive,

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[90] E.B. White, *One Man's Meat* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 170.

indiscriminating eyes, Charlotte proves time and again that nonviolent coexistence is not only a possibility but an absolute necessity in an increasingly conventional world—a necessity, moreover, that must be achieved first through freedom of thought and expression.

For Charlotte is a thinker in every sense of the word. Deeply connected with the histories and traditions that inform her current practices, Charlotte nonetheless practices mindfulness when she implements these ancient practices in her daily life. In one memorable scene, Charlotte describes to Wilbur the process behind her need to kill and eat live insects. The details, to the young pig, are horrific and only made worse by Charlotte's enthusiastic live demonstration on a hapless fly that has wandered into her web: "'There!' said Charlotte. 'Now I knock him out, so he'll be more comfortable.' She bit the fly. 'He can't feel a thing now,' she remarked. 'He'll make a perfect breakfast for me.'"[91] When Wilbur expresses disgust at her bloodthirsty actions, however, Charlotte counterbalances his reactivity with a truthful explanation:

> "It's true, and I have to say what is true. I am not entirely happy about my diet of flies and bugs, but it's the way I'm made. A spider has to pick up a living somehow or other, and I happen to be a trapper. I just naturally build a web and trap flies and other insects. My mother was a trapper before me. Her mother was a trapper before her. All our family have been trappers. Way back for thousands and thousands of years we spiders have been laying for flies and bugs."[92]

While this admission only confirms for Wilbur that Charlotte has acquired a "miserable inheritance," the spider's genealogical awareness illustrates her ability to think holistically about the forms of intergenerational cyclicity in which she participates, whether or not they appear to

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[91] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 38.

[92] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 39.

be merely "miserable" to others. Rather than elide the unpleasant truth, Charlotte therefore feels responsible for sharing with Wilbur what she knows of her distant past, even if that past includes her killing of living beings. In contrast to Mr. Arable, who only intends to kill Wilbur at the start of the novel because the latter is a runt pig, she makes it clear that her murders are necessary to promoting her own life—"a living," as she aptly calls the act of killing and eating a fly so that she can survive. She concludes with an honest reflection, however, about the living that she earns: "I don't know how the first spider in the early days of the world happened to think up this fancy idea of spinning a web, but she did, and it was clever of her, too. And since then, all of us spiders have had to work the same trick. It's not a bad pitch, on the whole."[93] Charlotte's critical self-awareness uniquely prepares her to confront the farm's problem of repetitious animal slaughter: by admitting her lack of complete knowledge about her family's past, she also acknowledges the complex history of a tradition that she might otherwise view as impenetrable and irrelevant. In doing so, she demonstrates the need to both acknowledge and mindfully employ past cycles in order to move toward a more productive future.

For in spite of her admiration of the tradition of web-weaving, Charlotte is also a highly innovative individual who is willing to improve upon—rather than simply reenact—time-honored practices in order to stop the unnatural cycles of murder that haunt Zuckerman's farm. The most striking instance of this creative impulse, of course, appears in the various words that she weaves into her web in order to convince the humans that Wilbur is a remarkable pig. Although the written contents of her web are miraculous in their own right, the keen attention that she pays to the production and form of her messages is equally vital to her creation. When the words "SOME PIG" first appear in Charlotte's web one foggy morning, for example,

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[93] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 40.

Charlotte's message appears not only in printed text (that is, the novel's serif typeface) but as a visually arresting illustration as well. The passage preceding the drawing reads as follows:

> There, in the center of the web, neatly woven in block letters, was a message. It said:
>
> SOME PIG!
>
> Lurvy felt weak. He brushed his hand across his eyes and stared harder at Charlotte's web.[94]

The words "SOME PIG" are quickly followed by an illustration, which enables the reader to experience firsthand the same pleasure as Lurvy does when he sees the web:

Figure 4.4. The words "Some Pig" appear in Charlotte's web.

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[94] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 77.

At a metafictional level, Charlotte's ability to transcend a strictly text-based reproduction of her message also emphasizes the web's unique, aesthetic quality. The words in the illustration appear jagged and imperfect, with halting sharp angles that make the writing appear almost childish.[95] Even the process by which Charlotte weaves these words into her web serves as a reminder that her artwork cannot be merely replicated or detached from its original meaning: later, when she spends an entire night weaving the word "TERRIFIC" into her web, she becomes dissatisfied with the appearance of her T and revises her letters with double lines so that it "will show up better."[96] The doubleness Charlotte produces here is significant: it not only demonstrates the spider's self-revisionary role as an artist, but also reveals that repetition (the act of retracing her steps to reinforce her first letters) possesses productive aesthetic potential when properly harnessed. As the narrator observes later in the novel when the whole town gathers at the county fair and sees Charlotte's web-writing hovering over Wilbur's pen once more: "Everyone rejoiced to find that the miracle of the web had been repeated."[97] As it turns out, Charlotte is not merely a clever planner and writer but a productive repeater as well: by successfully using the same tactic with strategic changes in wording to keep the human characters' wonder alive, Charlotte highlights the fundamental difference between routinized repetition and thoughtful reappropriation. In other words, through Charlotte's ability to rejuvenate a community's interest in Wilbur's individual life White introduces an imaginative, aesthetically-based solution to the problematic boredom of rural repetitiveness.

There are limitations, of course, to even Charlotte's artistic originality, which relies

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[95] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 78.

[96] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 93.

[97] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 149.

heavily on a culture of standardization and convention. For one thing, even the uniqueness of

Charlotte's written message is mass-produced in the widely reprinted children's novel that

contains it; even if the web's illustration appears unique, its mode of reproduction is not. Root

observes that the tension between commercial and artistic value appears repeatedly in White's

essays, which often juxtaposed the commercial world to which White objected (and in which he

made his living) with the natural world that he valued (and in which he felt more

comfortable)."[98] Despite the novel's countryside setting, *Charlotte's Web* does seem, as Ashraf

H.A. Rushdy maintains, "less a hymn to the barn and more a testament to the advertising

agency."[99] Throughout the narrative, for instance, Charlotte relies on printed ads for ideas and on

newspaper reports to spread the news about Wilbur beyond the farm; additionally, White slips in

sly references to marketing culture at strategically comic moments, as when Mrs. Arable arrives

at the fair "fanning herself with an advertisement of a deep freeze."[100] As if to underscore the

paradox of a novel that strives for originality in the context of an increasingly standardized

world, the words in Charlotte's web must compete visually with other printed words that appear

as illustrations, including a wrapper that reads "CRUNCHY" and a newspaper clipping that

contains the word "HUMBLE."[101]

 Though she tries to distance herself from their advertising quality, Charlotte nonetheless

relies on these discarded fragments of modern consumer culture to create her own art. Through

these seemingly incongruous moments of aesthetic innovation and mass marketing techniques,

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[98] Root, *E.B. White*, 37.

[99] Ashraf H.A. Rushdy. "'The Miracle of the Web': Community, Desire, and Narrativity in *Charlotte's Web*," *Lion and the Unicorn* 15, no. 2 (1991): 48.

[100] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 137.

[101] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 95.

White dispels the illusion that Charlotte merely represents a form of complete, nostalgic artistry. Instead, the author posits a model of artistic creation that is adaptable enough to embrace modern commodity culture—the very trade in which White participated as a prominent essayist and children's book author—as a legitimate media form for disseminating critical information to a wide-ranging audience of potential readers.

It is, after all, Charlotte's position as a writer—one that manages to positively affect public opinion both within and beyond the Zuckerman farm—that ultimately grants her such a privileged position of advocacy throughout *Charlotte's Web.* "In a sense the world dies every time a writer dies," White once wrote, "because if he is any good, he has been wet nurse to humanity during his entire existence and has held earth close around him."[102] As a lifelong advocate of effective writing practices such as those referenced in *Elements of Style*, White viewed the press as a body of invaluable, powerful members that—through its wide-reaching trade—was always engaged in cultivating a global consciousness that emphasized the world's shared humanity. Charlotte, with her selflessness and firm desire to influence a wide audience through her woven creations, is in this sense White's ideal writer: the narrative distinguishes her from the outset as an individual that is motivated by a deeply rooted belief in the universal right to live, and in the responsibility of advocates to spread this message as widely as possible—to be "wet nurse to humanity."[103]

By extension, and viewed as a whole, Charlotte's mission throughout the novel is a distinctly democratic one that fulfills the ideal of an accountable free press expressed by White

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[102] White, *Wild Flag*, 134.

[103] A case in contrast: Fern—for all her kind intentions—may fundamentally believe in the right of her pet pig to live, but her effort to convince others of its importance is limited to her parents and fades from the narrative after the novel's initial two chapters.

in September, 1950: "We can, and should, spread the material an American reads each morning in his paper—news, definitions, letters to the editor, texts, credos, reports, recipes, aims and intentions. We must reach and astonish with our kind of reporting the millions who hear almost nothing of that sort and who hardly know it exists."[104] Here, White refers specifically to the severe Russian censorship laws during the Cold War, which served as a constant reminder that the fundamental freedom to express oneself had yet to achieve universal acceptance. Even on the home front, however, the threat to an individual's freedom of expression was too real to ignore, and in the early 1950s White himself became an outspoken critic of what he called "a runaway loyalty-checking system in the hands of a few men." [105] He was referring, of course, to Senator Joseph McCarthy's bid to expunge alleged Communists from the ranks of government, public service, and—perhaps most troublingly for White—the media. The ramifications of McCarthy's unsupported claims, according to White, were not limited to the accused alone: the Senator's allegations encouraged a culture founded on suspicion between neighbors, which in turn would impede efforts to create a more global consciousness based on fellow-feeling. In response, White criticized the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (chaired by McCarthy) by calling it "the most delicate and dangerous job in the nation: the questioning of the values of one's fellow-citizens."[106]

Faced with the imminent danger of living in a culture of institutionally enforced silence and skepticism, White makes the only alternative clear in both his nonfiction and fiction of this period: individuals needed to resist the type of detachment cultivated by divisive postwar

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[104] White, *Writings from The* New Yorker*: 1927-1976*, ed. Rebecca M. Dale (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 33.

[105] E.B. White, Notes and Comments, *New Yorker*, 7 March 1953.

[106] White, Notes and Comments.

tensions by coming together in order to recognize their shared universal interests. Charlotte's unique position—as a self-publisher of broad messages that successfully disrupt a community's seasonal slaughter and "astonishes" the crowds that come to read them—is in this respect consistent with White's strong belief (as he expressed in a *Wild Flag* essay) that a free world press was possible only "as part of the structure of free world government, whose citizens, for the sake of gaining the right to know, relinquish the antique pleasure of remaining mutually unknowable; that is, detached, separate, independent."[107] By transcending the barnyard's anonymity and converting Zuckerman's farm into a popular destination through the "miracle of her web," Charlotte transforms this once isolated rural space into a public site for disseminating marvelous, accessible information to a broad audience. In doing so, she also lays the groundwork for cultivating a more open sense of connection between the barnyard members as well.

For Charlotte is interested not only in stopping cycles of violence—which for the author was an inadequate definition of the word "peace"—but also in actively bringing together an entire community of individuals in shared wonder and common cause. "Most people think of peace as a state of Nothing Bad Happening, or Nothing Much Happening," White explained in a 1960 *New Yorker* essay titled "Unity." He continues: "Yet if peace is to overtake us and make us the gift of serenity and well-being, it will have to be the state of Something Good Happening. What is this good thing? I think it is the evolution of community, community slowly and surely invested with the robes of government by the consent of the governed."[108] As White suggested in *Stuart Little*, it is only through the recognition of shared experiences that a more cosmopolitan vision of community can be achieved. Writing seven years after the publication of his first novel,

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[107] White, *Wild Flag*, 56.

[108] E.B. White, *Essays of E.B. White*, 101.

however, the author also makes it clear in *Charlotte's Web* that his earlier hopes for creating a world federation based on organized international cooperation might not have been as easily achievable as he had once imagined. On the subject of community in *Charlotte's Web*, for instance, White wrote the following response to Gene Dietch (an animation director and friend of White's): "Interdependence? I think it would be quite untrue to suggest that barnyard creatures are dependent on each other. The barn is a community of rugged individualists, everybody mildly suspicious of everybody else, including me." He concluded the letter with typical forthrightness: "Friendships sometimes develop, as between a goat and a horse, but there is no sense of true community or cooperation. Heaven forfend! Joy of life, yes. Tolerance of other cultures, yes. Community, no."[109]

This, then, is the key tension that separates White's highly politicized model for world federation in *Stuart Little* from his much more privately oriented vision of change in *Charlotte's Web.* Whereas his first novel puts its faith in the ability of global institutions such as the United Nations to transcend questions of national sovereignty in order to create a sense of true international community, White's second novel turns to the public potential of private individuals and their artistic expression. For a world embroiled in tense struggles for national supremacy under the guidance of a shaky, postwar United Nations, the prospect of Charlotte's responsible but unpoliticized leadership must have seemed like a vital solution to the troubling cycles of conflict and disconnect that haunt White's story. As Gabrielle Ceraldi observes: "Unlike her counterparts in the New York advertising industry, Charlotte seeks no fame herself, despite the skill with which she bestows it on Wilbur."[110] Although the spider's actions are wide-

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[109] White, *Letters of E.B. White*, 563.

[110] Gabrielle Ceraldi, "Advertising the Self: The Culture of Personality in E.B. White's

reaching and impactful, the style of leadership that she embodies—an understated gladness to enact change from an invisible station—could not be further from the highly visible, vocal (if compassionate) authority that Stuart asserts in the classroom as Chairman of the World. Instead, in a postwar world, Charlotte bears the burden that White himself—as a writer and public advocate for peaceful relations—also shouldered readily: the burden of exposing the failure of longstanding conventions and global institutions to bring about the change that the world needed in order to create international peace. Like White, who was famously private and self-deprecating about his writing ability, Charlotte remains safely tucked away in the background. As Janice M. Alberghene aptly notes: "Charlotte's public authorship is the more striking of the two kinds of composing [that is, private and public writing]. Ironically, however, only the reader, the animals, Fern, and one very singular adult character know or believe that Charlotte is special because she is the author of the words which appear in her web."[111]

It is fitting, then, that Charlotte's final act of private art is perhaps the novel's most cosmopolitan gesture of all, consistent with her mission as both a quiet leader and modern visionary. Her egg sac, filled with five hundred and fourteen eggs, exemplifies a form of natural cyclicity that revitalizes rather than stagnates the world: her children become citizens of the world, going, as one baby spider tells Wilbur, "wherever the wind takes us. High, low. Near, fear. East, west. North, south. We take to the breeze, we go as we please."[112] For once, Charlotte's art is a purely private act; unlike the web, which draws reporters and hundreds of visitors every day from neighboring areas, her egg sac demands no audience to secure its

Charlotte's Web," *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 6, no. 1 (2014): 91.

[111] Janice M. Alberghene, "Writing in *Charlotte's Web*," in *Critical Essays on E.B. White*, ed. Robert L. Root Jr. (New York: G.K. Hall, 1994), 81.

[112] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 180.

success—yet it does succeed admirably as an emblem of her democratically-minded productivity. In one of Charlotte's most memorable moments, the spider poetically responds to Wilbur's request that she show him her latest creation: "When the first light comes into the sky and the sparrows stir and the cows rattle their chains, when the rooster crows and the stars fade, when early cars whisper along the highway, you look up here and I'll show you something, I will show you my masterpiece."[113] The imagery Charlotte evokes draws together an unexpected amalgamation of elements: the awakening of free birds, the sound made by shackled cows, and the peripheral presence of transportation technology connecting the rural world with a vaster world of industrial progress.

In a surprising twist, her language quickly finds traction in the narrative itself, for the following chapter begins: "Next morning when the first light came into the sky and the sparrows stirred in the trees, when the cows rattled their chains and the rooster crowed and the early automobiles went whispering along the road, Wilbur awoke and looked for Charlotte."[114] Much like the human characters who encounter Charlotte's web and repeat her words as their own—the announcer at the local fair uses Charlotte's phraseology when he refers to Wilbur as to "this radiant, this terrific, this humble pig"—the narrator has reappropriated Charlotte's poetic discourse and memorialized it by incorporating it within the fabric of the narrative itself. This "common grey spider," as Zuckerman calls her, is not merely a writer and artist of the world; she is the writer who once more transforms mere printed reproducibility in *Charlotte's Web* into generative narrative possibility, even in death.

"It is time men allowed their imagination to infect their intellect," White wrote in 1956,

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[113] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 143.

[114] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 144.

"time we all rushed headlong into the wilder regions of thought where the earth again revolves around the sun instead of around the Suez, regions where no individual and no group can blithely assume the right sow the sky with seeds of mischief, and where the sovereign nation at last begins to function as the true friend and guardian of sovereign man."[115] The author's wistful reflection on the continuing isolation of individuals from one another echoes another familiar description, one that comes at the very end of *Charlotte's Web* after Charlotte has died:

> Wilbur never forgot Charlotte. Although he loved her children and grandchildren dearly, none of the new spiders ever quite took her place in his heart. She was in a class by herself. It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both.[116]

For White, Charlotte's status as a true friend and good writer are ultimately inseparable from her guardianship over a more democratic world order. If there is one thing that his second novel makes clear, it is the idea that compassion, expression, and a passionate heart for humanity are the prerequisites for expanding the scales and possibilities of a seemingly static world.

To this end (and despite the many changes in tone and circumstance that distinguish a wartime book such as *Stuart Little* from a postwar writing such as *Charlotte's Web*), White's political vision across these two works forms an overarching narrative that remains indelibly centered on the importance of rescaled global perspectives. In *Stuart Little*, as I have suggested, this type of recalibration occurs through the ability to adopt several seemingly incompatible views of the world at once, and to therefore imagine the world as a diverse space that accounts for every citizen equally, regardless of size or nationality. In *Charlotte's Web*, White modifies

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[115] White, *Points of My Compass*, 87.

[116] White, *Charlotte's Web*, 184.

this optimistic vision by foregrounding a new type of democratic leadership, one that is rooted in private acts of writing that can facilitate meaningful, generative change. Taken together in this context, these novels make it impossible to ignore the political resonances that ring true across White's writing, whether in his nonfiction essays or the realm of his realist fantasy for children. In this respect, this chapter's examination of White's novels also offers an apt concluding point for my study of the intellectual scales of children's fantasy. As the preceding chapters of this project demonstrate, my dissertation has aimed to establish a framework for understanding the critically overlooked continuity between authors' intellectual concerns and their writing for children. White's stories—with their complex engagement in discourses surrounding postwar America, scaled perspectives, and global unity—demonstrate beyond a doubt that such continuity not only exists, but also has the potential to expand significantly our current understandings of children's literature. In other words, these works highlight the ways in which children's fantasy is absorbed with telling ideas about its own intellectual histories, and in doing so enable us to cultivate a more holistic perspective on the scales of such ideas as well.

Coda

On 26 July 1951, Walt Disney Productions released its cinematic adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*, a 75-minute musicalized feature film based on Lewis Carroll's *Alice* novels. In a letter to a New Jersey fan, Walt Disney explained his reasons for adapting the original stories through animation rather than live action (as he had done in a series of short films titled *Alice in Cartoonland* between 1924 and 1926).[1] "Practically everyone who has read and loved the book of necessity sees the Tenniel Alice," Disney wrote, "and no matter how closely we approximate her with a living Alice, I feel the result would be a disappointment."[2] The film—which faced the daunting task of translating one of the best-known classics of English children's literature onto the big screen—was ambitious in scope but ultimately fell flat with critics, who lamented its lack of fidelity to its source material. "[Disney] shows scant respect for the integrity of the original creations of authors, manipulating and vulgarizing everything for his own ends," children's librarian Frances Clarke Sayers notoriously declared in a scathing letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, adding in another interview: "If you read *Treasure Island*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *The Wind in the Willows*, you will see for yourself how Disney has destroyed something which was delightful, which was an expression of an individual mind and imagination."[3] Disney himself admitted that *Alice* had been a particularly tricky project: "That was the trouble with Alice. There

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[1] Leonard Maltin, *The Disney Films*, 4th ed. (New York: Disney Editions, 2000), 3.

[2] Walt Disney, "Letter to a New Jersey fan," cited in Bob Thomas, *Walt Disney: An American Original* (New York: Disney Editions, 1994), 221.

[3] Frances Clarke Sayers, letter to *Los Angeles Times*, 25 April 1965; "Walt Disney Accused," interview with Frances Clarke Sayers conducted by Charles M. Weisenberg, *FM and Fine Arts*, August 1965.

we had a classic we couldn't tamper with…I resolved never to do another one."[4] Even positive

reviews of the animated film were quick to qualify the nature of their praise: "Note well…that

we're judging by the entertainment merits of the film, not by its artistic fitness or its fidelity to

the works of Mr. Carroll," Bosley Crowther pointed out his 1951 review of the animated

adaptation. "Merit as visual entertainment does not necessarily mean virtue (or even propriety) as

a translation of a classic of literature."[5] Met with a lukewarm response by film critics and

moviegoers alike, the film earned a disappointing $2.4 million at the box office and became an

example of the pitfalls associated with unfaithfully adapting stories for the big screen.[6]

Over the past thirty or so years in particular, the critical backlash against what Richard

Schickel famously called the "Disneyfication" of literary classics has marked an illuminating

period in the field of children's literature scholarship.[7] From Carroll's *Alice* stories to E.B.

White's *Charlotte's Web*, the afterlives of the stories that I have studied in this dissertation have

become the subjects of considerable renewed scholarly scrutiny, as well as the targets of much

skepticism about the future of children's fantasy more broadly. Henry A. Giroux, Eric M.

Meyers, Julia P. McKnight, and Lindsey M. Krabbenhoft, for instance, find very few redeeming

qualities in media adaptations of children's fantasy such as Disney's, arguing that these versions

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[4] Walt Disney, quoted in Bob Thomas, *Walt Disney: The Art of Animation* (New York: Disney Editions, 1958), 22.

[5] Bosley Crowther, "The Screen in Review: Disney's Cartoon Adaption of 'Alice in Wonderland' Arrives at Criterion," *New York Times*, 30 July 1951, http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E04E6DF1731EF3BBC4850DFB166838A649ED E (accessed 17 May 2017).

[6] "The Top Box Office Hits of 1951," *Variety*, 2 January 1952.

[7] Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997).

often perpetuate myths of social powerlessness in child viewers and reinforce restrictive gender

stereotypes for young girls.[8] Other scholars lament what they perceive to be the lost art of

creating effective fantasy narratives: "This knowledge need not be intellectualized," Schickel

cautions his readers. "Indeed, it better not be, since in the overthought adaptation 'the spiritual

sap of the work dries up, and the whole thing falls apart like so much dead wood,' as Jonathan

Miller says."[9] Time and again, these recent studies have censured adapted versions of children's

fantasy for their apparent superficiality, market-driven story-building techniques, and uncouth

"intellectualization" of established literary traditions. In the process, such critiques have also

further nostalgized the original works of Carroll, J.M. Barrie, A.A. Milne, and E.B. White,

granting them a certain degree of immunity to such critical judgments.

As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, however, these conflicting ideas

concerning oversimplification, wistful remembrance, and intellectual skepticism are far from

new: they have dogged the work of scholars since the beginning of modern children's fantasy

studies, stretching as far back as to F.J. Harvey Darton's romantic reflection that Barrie's

Neverland is only "a dream within the reach of most of us. Wonderland is always close, peopled

with images that our waking eyes and ears have planted in our half-conscious mind, in order that

they should grow, and be glorified into the perfect shapes of fantasy that live only when sight

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[8] See Henry A. Giroux, "Animating Youth: The Disneyfication of Children's Culture," *Socialist Review* 24, no. 3 (1995): 23-55; Eric M. Meyers, Julia P. McKnight, and Lindsey M. Krabbenhoft, "Remediating Tinker Bell: Exploring Childhood and Commodification through a Century-Long Transmedia Narrative," *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 6, no. 1 (2014): 95-118.

[9] Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 226. Schickel is quoting Jonathan Miller, "Another Wonderland," *New York Times Book Review*, 7 May 1967.

and sound are still."[10] These preconceptions have maintained their tenacious grip, too, in Martin Green's warning about the inane, simplistic quality of Victorian and Edwardian children's fantasy, or what he once called "the charm of childhood": "But suddenly we had Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear and Puck of Pook's Hill, and Christopher Robin was Saying his Prayers," Green reflects in his analysis of this body of literature. "We had whimsy and fantasy and well-bred infantilism. Stories of adventure and action were replaced by stories of fairies and flowers."[11] As the largely negative critical responses to Disney's adaptations makes clear, these types of judgments—which scholars have begun to interrogate more frequently in recent years—still persist in current discussions of children's media and fantasy, if only in a new guise.

By way of conclusion, I therefore propose that the challenge now facing critics who wish to examine seriously the intellectual stakes of children's fantasy literature from Carroll onward is more divisive—and in many ways more urgent—than ever before. With the proliferation of sequels, spinoffs, adaptations, and abridged versions through twentieth- and twenty-first-century media, the impulse to sanctify the original stories of authors such as Carroll, Barrie, Milne, and White has gained unprecedented momentum in recent studies of children's literature. Instead of examining critically the complex ideas that have made these canonical works such vital sources for subsequent reimaginings, many scholars have tended in the opposite direction, lambasting modern media conglomerates for producing spiritless reproductions while reminiscing broadly about their own first encounters with the original texts—as if these texts were static artifacts to preserve and protect in their inaugural forms. Joel D. Chaston, for example, indulges in this type of personal reflection when he compares two versions of the *Alice* stories: "Disney's Alice," he

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[10] F.J. Harvey Darton, *J.M. Barrie* (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), 96.

[11] Martin Green, "The Charm of Peter Pan," *Children's Literature* 9 (1981): 20-21.

reflects, "which mixes elements from both of Carroll's Alice books, has some visually brilliant moments (I must admit to being partial to the 'Walrus and the Carpenter' sequence). Nevertheless, the film, which filters out most of Carroll's complexity and much of the book's humor and pathos, becomes yet another melodramatic Oz wannabe…a schizophrenic [production] with competing and contradictory subtexts."[12] In a similar vein, Richard Jenkyns notes in his examination of the *Pooh* stories that the animated adaptations can hardly do the original Milne tales justice: "It is certainly true that many adults are offended by the Disney travesty of Pooh…Partly this is because by the time they got their hands on Pooh the Disney studios had lost the creative vitality that redeems their earlier films, partly because their coarse draftsmanship insults [illustrator Ernest] Shepard's original vision."[13]

But as more and more individuals encounter these narratives for the first time through adapted media rather than original texts, I suggest that we need to return to the elements of transformation and rescaling that have made these classic literary works so peculiarly well suited to endless adaptation, both over time and around the world. While I have addressed this issue directly with respect to Barrie's *Peter Pan* myth, it is worth mentioning here that the four authors that I have studied in this dissertation—Carroll, Barrie, Milne, and White—are responsible for some of the most widely adapted literary classics of all time. Carroll's *Alice* novels alone have provided the basis for countless artistic reinterpretations, including Salvador Dali's twelve illustrations (1969) based on *Alice in Wonderland*, the ABC channel miniseries *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland* (2013), and Tim Burton's most recent film sequel, *Alice Through the*

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[12] Joel D. Chaston, "The 'Ozification' of American Children's Fantasy Films: The Blue Bird, Alice in Wonderland, and Jumanji," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1997): 16, 13.

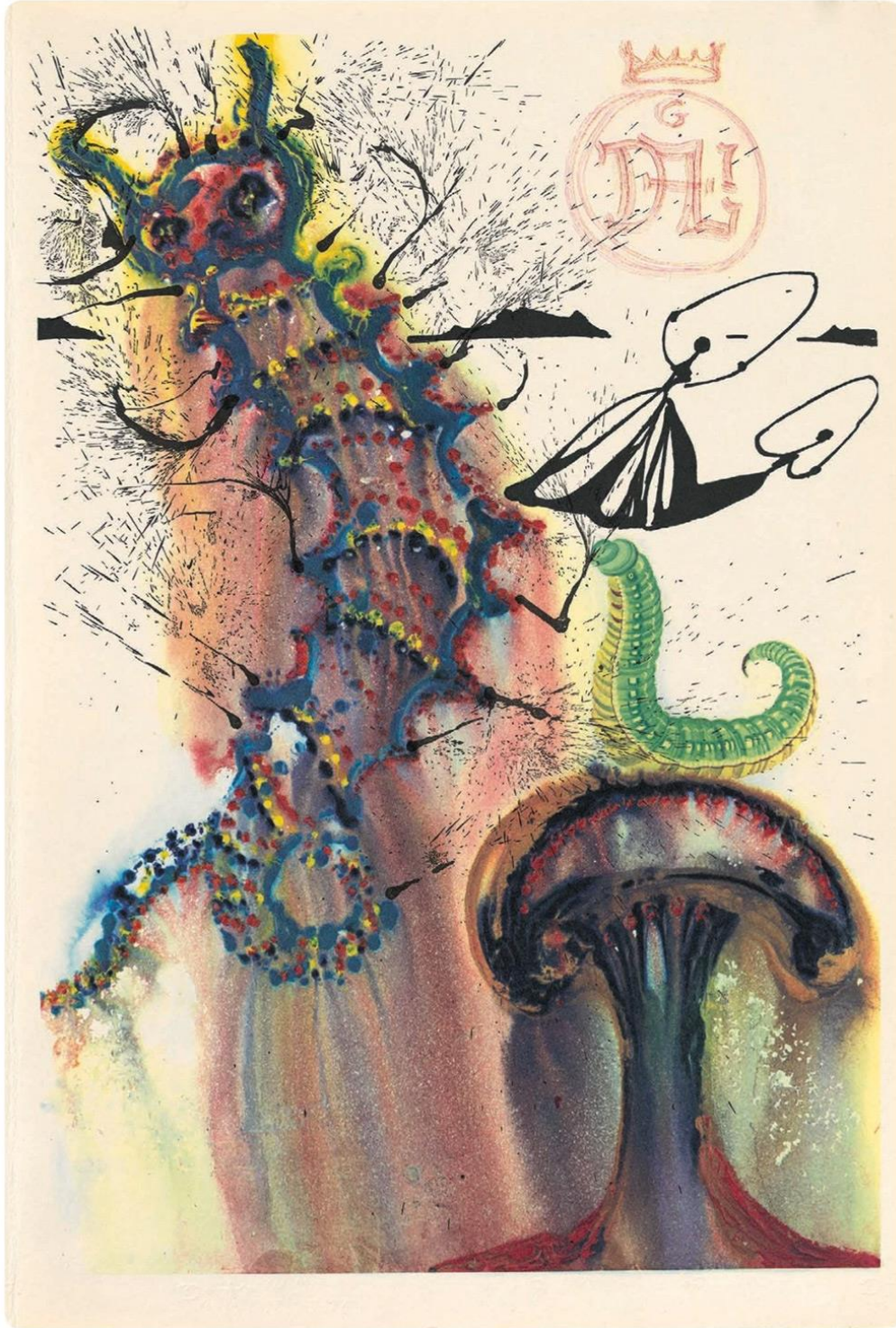[13] Richard Jenkyns, "True Pooh," *New Republic* 203, no. 16 (1990): 52.

Figure 5.1. Salvador Dali's "Advice from a Caterpillar."[14]

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[14] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, 150th Anniversary Edition Illustrated by Salvador Dali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 41.

Looking Glass (2016). Barrie's *Peter Pan* stories, as I have mentioned in my second chapter, have also inspired many recognizable adaptations, among them Disney's animated *Peter Pan* (1953), Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson's *Peter and the Starcatchers* books (2004-2009), and a live action film titled *Pan* (2015), which explores the origin story of its eponymous protagonist and Captain Hook. Walt Disney Productions—which acquired the rights to Milne's *Pooh* stories in 1961, a few years after the author's death—continues to produce film and television renditions featuring the famous tubby bear, while three short Russian films starring "*Vinni Pukh*" are more famous in Russia now than are their Americanized counterparts.[15] Even White, whose children's books have been adapted only on a handful of occasions, made it clear throughout his lifetime that he viewed his published stories as only the beginning of an ever-expanding process: the author spent many long years corresponding with director Gene Deitch about producing an appropriate film adaptation of *Charlotte's Web*, which was finally released by Hanna-Barbera Productions in 1973.[16]

Rather than being incidental to their success, I argue that these stories' constantly evolving sense of narrative scales is crucial to their persistent fascination in the popular imagination, which continues to access these metamorphic stories in ever-proliferating formats. Carolyn Sigler has aptly suggested that the loose, dream-like structure of Carroll's writing in particular opens up a space for many (and even contradictory) readings: "The *Alice* books' enduring power and appeal," she concludes, "may very well lie in the fact that, like dreams, they *can* mean whatever readers *need* them to mean."[17] I want to broaden this claim by proposing that

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[15] Maria Nikolajeva, "Russian Children's Literature Before and After Perestroika," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (1995): 107.

[16] E.B. White, *Letters of E.B. White*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 563.

the unique fantasy structures of the works that I have examined—their emphasis on constant expansion and contraction, and on the transformative qualities that have rendered them so significant in cognizing some of the most important intellectual ideas of their day—lend themselves to the infinite adaptation and reinterpretation that they have experienced since they initially appeared. While many critics are quick to dismiss these works' adaptations for their inability to capture the simple spirit of the originals, we also forget—or perhaps are only too willing to forget—that the "originals" are themselves always in the process of being reimagined by their authors and audiences alike. Marina Warner is keenly attuned to the complexity of these works' afterlives when she observes: "It is simply unthinking and lazy to denounce all the works of Disney and his legacy…In the last decade of the century, in conditions of radical change on the one hand, and stagnation on the other, with ever increasing fragmentation and widening polarities…there has been a strongly marked shift towards fantasy as a mode of understanding, as an ingredient in survival, as a lever against the worst aspects of the status quo and the direction it is taking."[18]

It is this final quality of intellectual and social clarity—of helping readers and viewers alike to render more intelligible (through acts of fantastic rescaling) the dynamic world that they inhabit—that makes the narratives that I have studied in this dissertation so strangely enduring. Even in their afterlives, the stories of Carroll, Barrie, Milne, and White continue to adapt and evolve, telling ideas about a world that refuses to be reduced to a static model or mere theory. In this sense, these works of children's fantasy act as important experiments in recalibrating not

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[17] Carolyn Sigler, ed., *Alternative Alices: Visions and Revisions of Lewis Carroll's* Alice *Books* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), xiv

[18] Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (New York: Noonday Press, 1994), 414-15.

only the intellectual scales of their particular historical moments, but also in expanding the scale of narratives about the past, the future, and every possible iteration of worlds that have yet to be imagined.

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