The Principle of Pooh: Reading Children's Literature as Political Theory

By:

Martha Lintang Pitre

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts (M.A.)

McGill University

Department of Political Science

Montréal, Québec

July 2024

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Acknowledgements

No part of this thesis would have been completed without the patience and encouragement of my supervisor, Prof. Yves Winter. When I first conceived of this paper in my very first semester as a McGill student, I was insecure, hesitant to voice my thoughts, and thoroughly uncomfortable with the experience of graduate school. Prof. Winter guided me through this time with empathy, kindness, and a sharp eye on the 'point' concealed behind my many ramblings. Thank you, Prof. Winter, for your innumerable contributions to this thesis and to the many papers, proposals, and musings that have informed it.

I would also like to thank Prof. Daniel Weinstock for inspiring many of the ideas presented in this thesis, and to Prof. Jacob Levy for cultivating an environment of openness, curiosity, and humor at McGill. I would also like to give special thanks to Prof. Loralea Michaelis for Horkheimer, for opening my eyes to the bright and buzzing world of political theory, and for seeing in me what I couldn't see in myself as an undergraduate.

This paper received two invaluable rounds of feedback in 2023, first at the Harvard Graduate Conference in Political Theory in Cambridge, then later at the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) Society's Seventh Annual Meeting in New Orleans. Thank you to all who contributed their comments, particularly Abbie LeBlanc, Hannah Kunzman, and Connor Kianpour.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. Aj, Mom, and Jesse: Thank you for the incredible sacrifices that you have made to make this thesis possible, and for your endless love and support. Thank you for helping me become the kind of person that 'Little Martha' would have been proud of. This thesis is for her.

Abstract, English

Works of children's fiction, rich with varied depictions of ideal worlds and transformative possibilities, are rarely considered within the tradition of utopian political thought. Why is this, and why does it matter? To answer this question, I examine Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* (1954) alongside A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928). In this thesis, I aim to demonstrate that recognizing children's literature as political theory necessitates reconceptualizing the child as an equal, agential political subject.

The argument unfolds in four parts. In Part I, I make the methodological argument that children's literature ought to be considered a worthy area of study for political theorists. In this section, I draw heavily from key thinkers in the history of political thought and defend the claims that the exercise of reading children's literature as political theory can (1) help problematize the deficiency-style assumptions held commonly about children in the history of political thought; and (2) serve to situate children as agents of change and competent observers of the social world.

The remainder of the paper is devoted to testing my methodological argument against a literary case study. In Part II, I examine Bloch's conceptualization of the child subject and the time of childhood, highlighting issues with his highly idealized treatment. In Part III, I defend the classification of Milne's *Pooh* stories as works of utopian literature, drawing on the three evaluative dimensions proposed by Ruth Levitas (1990): content, form and function. In Part IV, I focus narrowly on how Milne's *Pooh* works figure within the Blochian framework, arguing that the works reveal moments of concrete utopia by: (1) breaking down the "contents of fear" (Bloch, 5); (2) providing "open space [for] its object which is to be realized and which realizes itself forward" (Bloch, 156); and (3) exploring the abstract principles for human flourishing.

Finally, I discuss four possible limitations or objections to my methodological and political arguments: the problem of actionability, the problem of adult authorship, the problem of epistemic authority when it comes to children, and the problem of *Pooh* as a product of the culture industry. Ultimately, I conclude that my interpretation of Milne's *Pooh* works requires that the child subject is regarded as a *competent observer and maker* of the Real-Possible. By proposing and demonstrating the exercise of reading children's literature as political theory, my thesis highlights the overlooked connection between the child subject and emancipatory politics, which I explore within the framework of utopian political thought.

Résumé, français

Les œuvres de fiction pour enfants, riches en représentations variées de mondes idéaux et de possibilités de transformation, sont rarement considérées dans la tradition de la pensée politique utopique. Pourquoi en est-il ainsi et pourquoi est-ce important ? Pour répondre à cette question, j'examine *The Principle of Hope* (1954) d'Ernst Bloch, ainsi que *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) et *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928) d'A.A. Milne. Dans cette thèse, je vise à démontrer que la reconnaissance de la littérature enfantine en tant que théorie politique nécessite de reconceptualiser l'enfant en tant que sujet politique égal et agentiel.

L'argumentation se déroule en quatre parties. Dans la première partie, je présente l'argument méthodologique selon lequel la littérature pour enfants devrait être considérée comme un domaine d'étude digne des théoriciens politiques. Dans cette partie, je m'inspire fortement des principaux penseurs de l'histoire de la pensée politique et je défends l'idée que la lecture de la littérature enfantine en tant que théorie politique peut (1) aider à problématiser les hypothèses de style déficient communément admises à propos des enfants dans l'histoire de la pensée politique ;

et (2) servir à situer les enfants en tant qu'agents de changement et observateurs compétents du monde social.

Le reste de l'article est consacré à la vérification de mon argument méthodologique à l'aide d'une étude de cas littéraire. Dans la deuxième partie, je déconstruis la conceptualisation de Bloch sur l'enfant sujet et le temps de l'enfance, en soulignant les problèmes liés à son traitement hautement idéalisé. Dans la troisième partie, je défends la classification de *Pooh* en tant qu'œuvre de littérature utopique, en m'appuyant sur les trois dimensions évaluatives proposées par Ruth Levitas (1990) : le contenu, la forme et la fonction. Dans la quatrième partie, je me concentre sur la manière dont les œuvres de Milne s'inscrivent dans le cadre blochien, en soutenant que les œuvres révèlent des moments d'utopie concrète : (1) en brisant le "contenu de la peur" (Bloch, 5); (2) en fournissant "un espace ouvert [pour] son objet qui doit être réalisé et qui se réalise en avant" (Bloch, 156) ; et (3) en explorant les principes abstraits de l'épanouissement humain.

Enfin, je discute de quatre limitations ou objections possibles à mes arguments méthodologiques et politiques : le problème de l'actionnabilité, le problème de l’auteur adulte, le problème de l'autorité épistémique lorsqu'il s'agit d'enfants, et le problème *Pooh* en tant que produit de l'industrie culturelle. En fin de compte, je conclus que mon interprétation des œuvres de Milne exige que le sujet enfant soit considéré comme un observateur compétent et un créateur du Réel-Possible. En proposant et en démontrant l'exercice de lecture de la littérature enfantine en tant que théorie politique, ma thèse met en lumière le lien négligé entre le sujet enfant et la politique émancipatrice, que j'explore dans le cadre de la pensée politique utopique.

Introduction

In the long tradition of 'serious' utopian literature, the lives of children and young people have tended to be overlooked. In many literary utopias, children are emblematic of the hope and promise of the New World. Their education is taken very seriously, and their moral upbringing is carefully considered. But rarely do utopian fictions offer glimpses into the inner worlds and everyday trials of their youngest members. On the contrary, children tend to be 'dragged along' through utopian narratives driven by adult protagonists. Unlike their grown-up counterparts, the children of utopia are not only subject to the authority and paternalism of the society's rulers but also to the whims of adult caretakers who have their 'best interests' at heart. Hidden away in these marginal caretaking spaces, their accounts of utopian life go mostly unheard. Glimpsing utopia through a child's eyes usually requires turning to a different literary genre entirely, one that is not considered part of the mainstream utopian tradition. Works of children's fiction, rich with varied depictions of idyllic worlds and transformative possibilities, are undeniably full of utopia and yet not seriously considered *utopian*. Why is this, and why does it matter?

I argue that this paradoxical phenomenon is in part symptomatic of a much larger issue in the history of political thought: the seemingly unquestioned exclusion of children from democratic life. From Aristotle to Arendt, many important political writings have only considered children insofar as they relate to adult concerns about the "needs of the political community."[1] For these thinkers and many others, children are only publicly significant because of their potential to one day participate meaningfully in adult political life. They are excluded from it in childhood because they are thought to be incomplete social and political people who are 'on their way' to reaching their potential as rational agents. Children are commonly

[1] James G. Dwyer, "Children and the Law: An Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Children and the Law*, ed. James G. Dwyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190694395.001.0001.

understood to be, as Anca Gheaus puts it, "unfinished adults"[2] who exist outside of the bounds of public life. The conceptual paradigm that treats the child subject as deficient and pre-political is, I argue, regressive. It reinforces the notion that the child is a passive and uncritical figure: a "blank slate on which the ideas of its parents and the society are inscribed."[3] It undermines the agency of the child subject and reproduces unproductive narratives about children's 'inherent' deficiencies.

If utopian political thought is understood to be enmeshed in this particular history, then my paper need only prove that the critique is sufficiently evidenced in the history of political thought. However, I propose instead that the marginalization of children is especially problematic within the realm of utopian political thought, since it tends to be generally—albeit imperfectly—concerned with the social and political progress of all people. Traditional utopian fictions like More's *Utopia*, Campanella's *City of the Sun*, and even Plato's *Republic,* despite their emancipatory commitments, tend to fall prey to the same critiques as outlined above. The exploration of better worlds for children and young people is a task that belongs to an entirely different literary genre: children's literature. As put by scholar and children's author Clémentine Beauvais, children's literature "desires something different, something unplanned, something freer."[4] It is intuitively utopian in its content, form, and function, yet the genre has been curiously overlooked as an area of study in utopian political thought.

The utopias depicted in children's literature are not always written for the purpose of sketching out alternative material worlds, nor must they provide "models of societal functioning

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[2] Anca Gheaus, "Unfinished Adults and Defective Children," *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (June 5, 2017), https://doi.org/10.26556/jesp.v9i1.85.

[3] Meike Sophia Baader et al., *Reconceptualising Agency and Childhood: New Perspectives in Childhood Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 140.

[4] Clémentine Beauvais, *The Mighty Child* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015), 209.

that encapsulate the wants and needs of people which remain unfulfilled in the present."[5] Works of children's literature might not even refer to political structures or the language of rights, government, or liberty. Children's literature *is* political because it tends to reference both child and adult visions of 'better' worlds. The genre broadly and variously represents moments of peace, prosperity, justice, and morality. It inevitably contains within it the aspirations, hopes, longings, and anxieties of the ruling adult class for the newest generational cohort. Children's literature *is made* political by the context in which it exists. For example, many contemporary authors choose to use the genre as a vehicle for political statements or advocacy (e.g., Innosanto Nagara's *A is for Activist*, Ibram X. Kendi's *Antiracist Baby*, Julie Merberg's *My First Book of Feminism*). The purpose of these kinds of books are pedagogical: some seek to challenge biases, prejudices, and stereotypes from the earliest ages. Others provide representation for children with historically marginalized identities. Still more hope to promote critical thinking, empathy, and inclusivity. The paradigmatic designation of children in political thought as pre-political, as existing outside the bounds of democratic life, does not mesh neatly with this account of children's literature as inherently and contextually political. I propose that part of the discontinuity between both accounts exists because of a core protectionist claim that is embedded, whether implicitly or explicitly, in many historical political writings that reference children. In brief, children are considered pre-political because, before a certain age or level of developmental maturity, they are understood to lack the relevant capacities necessary to engage meaningfully in the processes which constitute democratic decision-making.[6] As argued by Arendt in *The Crisis in Education*, by confining children to the private realm, we both protect

[5] Ivor Sarakemsky, "Utopia as Political Theory," *Politikon* 20, no. 2 (December 1993), 112, https://doi.org/10.1080/02589349308704997.

[6] See e.g., Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York City: Basic Books, 1979), Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. 1859. Reprint, Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001, D. A. Habibi, "The Status of Children in John Stuart Mill's Theory of Liberty," *Educational Theory* 33, no. 2 (1983): 61–72, Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," *Dissent Magazine*, 1959.

"the child against the world" and "the world against the child."[7] Children are, by virtue of their perceived level of development, considered unfit for democratic life: they are pre-political until such time as they are understood to cross the legal threshold into adulthood. The exclusion of children's fictions from the scope of political thought is, I would argue, a product of this predominant line of argumentation. The problem is therefore circular and self-reinforcing: children have been marginalized in political thought because they are considered, for the reason of their perceived developmental immaturity, pre-political. At the same time, I claim that children's status as pre-political is reinforced by their fictions' exclusion from political thought.

The central aim of my thesis is to illustrate one possible way to break from this apparent circularity. The exercise of reading children's literature as political theory demands that we probe the question of *who* gets to be politically statused. It requires a more expansive and inclusive understanding of what it means to live a political life and necessitates a thorough reconceptualization of the child as an equal political subject. Similar questions have been raised by and for other historically marginalized groups, including women, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and racialized peoples who have long struggled with their associations to their perceived 'childishness'.[8] The problem of children's marginalization from public life is relevant and urgent in a similar way, and is necessarily connected to these allied bids for inclusion. In my paper, I will undertake the exercise of reading children's literature as political theory within the area of utopian political thought because it serves as an intuitive bridge between the distinctly political (i.e., with concerns about justice, freedom, emancipation,

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[7] Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Education," in *Between Past and Future*, 1961, 11, http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/330T/350kPEEArendtCrisisInEdTable.pdf.

[8] See e.g., Toby Rollo, "Feral Children: Settler Colonialism, Progress, and the Figure of the Child," *Settler Colonial Studies* 8, no. 1 (June 29, 2016): 60–79, Fiona Macdonald and Alexandra Dobrowolsky, *Turbulent Times, Transformational Possibilities? Gender and Politics Today and Tomorrow.* (North York: University Of Toronto Press, 2020), and Rachel Rosen and Katherine Twamley, *Feminism and the Politics of Childhood: Friends or Foes?* (London: UCL Press, 2018).

equality, etc.) and the world of fiction and fairytale that constitutes much of the genre of children's literature.

I derive my concept of utopia from Ernst Bloch, as presented in his seminal work on hope, *The Principle of Hope*. Bloch, a German philosopher whose work inspired several of the Frankfurt School critical theorists, is widely recognized within utopian studies as "*the* philosopher of the utopian function."[9] While Bloch cannot be said to represent the whole of utopian political thought, his writings are nevertheless considered foundational to the study of utopianism. Furthermore, Bloch differentiates himself from the vast majority of thinkers in the history of political thought by taking children's literature seriously as a site of emancipatory politics. In *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch aims to reveal moments of utopia in a variety of cultural objects and forms. The function of the fairytale, full of its "standardized wishes"[10] and "random and abstract escapism,"[11] oscillates in Bloch's view between two seemingly contradictory poles. There is a sense that Bloch understands fairytales as Marx and Engles do: as compensatory vehicles of abstract fantasy. In fact, Bloch often uses the term 'fairytale' in a dismissive way to describe things that are unrealistic, pacifying or escapist (e.g., "this is a fairytale solution"[12] or "a fairytale-like lavishness"[13]). At the same time, there is another sense that Bloch celebrates the "forgotten spirit of fairytale,"[14] which expresses a utopian desire that is more concrete and anticipatory. The fairytale, in holding up a mirror to people's desires,

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[9] Jack Zipes, *Ernst Bloch: The Pugnacious Philosopher of Hope* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 38 (my emphasis added).

[10] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Stephen Plaice, Neville Plaice, and Paul Knight, vol. 1, 2 and 3 (1954; repr., Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 13.

[11] *Ibid.,* 14.

[12] *Ibid.,* 98.

[13] *Ibid.,* 99.

[14] *Ibid.,* 13.

colorfully represents a "supposedly or genuinely better"[15] world, albeit one purposely distanced from the "insignificant world near at hand."[16]

Using a Blochian theoretical framework, I aim to make legible the way that children's literature not only reflects but can actively contribute to the discussion of the status of children in public life. By reading children's literature as political theory, I hope to subvert and transcend the limitations imposed by the traditional deficiency view of childhood. The central contribution of my thesis is therefore both normative and methodological: it will advocate for a thorough revaluation of the political status of children, thus expanding the bounds of what it might mean to be a political subject.

The argument will proceed in four parts. In Part I, I make the methodological argument that the exercise of reading children's literature as political theory can (1) help problematize the deficiency-style assumptions held commonly about children in the history of political thought, especially those concerning their perceived dependency and vulnerability; and (2) serve to firmly situate children as agents of change and observers of the social world. The arguments respond to crucial moments in the history of political thought that have entrenched the deficiency view of childhood. In the following sections, I apply my methodological argument to a literary case study by undertaking a Blochian reading of A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*. In Part II, I propose Bloch's theory of utopia and its connection to the child subject, focusing specifically on the aspects of utopian thinking that are politically statused. In Part III, I defend the classification of Milne's *Pooh* stories as works of utopian literature, drawing on the three evaluative dimensions proposed by Ruth Levitas (1990): content, form, and function. In Part IV, I fold Milne's works into Bloch's, arguing that *Pooh* constitutes a moment of concrete

[15] *Ibid.,* 13.
[16] *Ibid*., 353.

utopia by (1) breaking down the "contents of fear;"[17] providing "open space [for] its object which is to be realized and which realizes itself forward;"[18] and (3) exploring the abstract principles for human flourishing.

Part I | Reading Children's Literature as Political Theory

Throughout the history of political thought, children have been thought to have a limited, if not completely invisible, place in public life. The marginalization of children tends to revolve around the fundamental belief in children's lack of capacity, broadly and variously defined, to participate meaningfully in the kind of discussion, deliberation, and decision-making that constitutes democratic life. This traditional deficiency view of childhood can be traced back to Aristotle, who advanced an early version of the *tabula rasa* account of infants as born empty of abilities or inherent knowledge.[19] Per Aristotle, children live in a state of ethical instability until they are seventeen:[20] "they cannot be said to possess "moral "virtues" or "excellences," such as practical wisdom, a sense of justice, or even the capacity for genuine happiness."[21] They lack what full moral agents possess: the ability to make conscious choices in accordance with virtue, towards a final end.[22] Children's appetitive nature undermines this ability, making them ill-suited for the demands of the polis. But unlike women or slaves, children in Aristotle do not remain partially formed.[23] Since "natural consideration, comprehension and judgment [...] correspond to

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[17] *Ibid*., 5.

[18] *Ibid*., 156.

[19] Aristotle, *De Anima*, ed. and trans. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 493.

[20] The selection of seventeen as the threshold for adulthood is not arbitrary. It follows the seven-year life cycle widely used in Antiquity and the Middle Ages to designate the stages of childhood (see e.g., Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 51.)

[21] John Wall, "Human Rights in Light of Childhood," *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 16, no. 4 (2008): 527, https://doi.org/10.1163/157181808x312122.

[22] Aristotle, "Physics," in *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy from Thales to Aristotle*, ed. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2016), 197b: 7-10.

[23] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House: The Modern Library, 1943).

someone's age,"[24] non-women and non-slave children are only deficient to the extent that they are not yet adult men.

Aristotle's deficiency argument appears again in the Middle Ages. It is presented most memorably in Saint Augustine,[25] who conceived of children's deficiencies in terms of their perceived spiritual corruption. Contrary to Aristotle's *tabula rasa* view of childhood or any romanticized account of infants and children as innocent, Augustine promoted the idea that children are born stained with Original Sin: "The only innocent feature in babies is the weakness of their frames; the minds of infants are far from innocent."[26] They are consumed by "inopportunity, jealousy, and aggressiveness."[27] While this is not an explicitly political claim, Augustine nevertheless saw the church as playing a critical role in safeguarding children in the private realm until the age of puberty, at which time the child would assume legal responsibility. In many writings on children from the medieval era, puberty is often understood as the demarcating line between childhood and adulthood:[28] as the 'gate' between private and public life.

Aquinas re-formulates the Aristotelian argument in explicitly political terms. In his *Commentary on Politics*, Aquinas writes that "we need not consider all persons necessary for the existence of the political community to be citizens. For example, children and grown men are not citizens in the same way. The men are absolutely such, and the children qualifiedly such, *since*

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[24] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2019), 1143b: 6-13.

[25] The argument appears as well in Aquinas and Luther (see e.g., Saint Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Catholic Way Publishing, 2014), Supplement Q. 43, Jennifer A Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2012) 189, and Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 100-189.

[26] Augustine, *The Confessions*, ed. John E Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1997), 46.

[27] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1992), 91.

[28] *Ibid*., 22.

they are not mature."[29] The status of citizenship is limited and contingent on age, which is understood to stand in as a proxy for one's ability to participate effectively in political life.

Perhaps from Augustine, Hobbes inherits the notion that children are born with Original Sin. In his account, it is the job of mothers in the private sphere to control and regulate children's defects.[30] Hobbes justifies this arrangement by understanding the family as a site in which obedience to the sovereign is practiced.[31] It mirrors the argument made previously by Augustine that children must be taught to withstand the rigors of adult life through strict discipline in the family.[32] In Hobbes and Augustine both, it is crucial that children learn to submit to paternal authority in order to prepare themselves for the kind of submission required of adults in political community. This is an argument that appears again in Locke: because "the minds of children [are] as easily turned as this or that way, as water itself,"[33] parents must correctly and consciously educate their children so that they might one day overcome the "defects of their imperfect state."[34] Amélie Delage summarizes Locke's position thus: "the natural freedom of children must be denied if we want them to be able to "own it" once they reach the Age of Majority."[35] In other words, it is fair and just that children be denied rights to participation in democratic life precisely because of their state of incompleteness. Children have the *potential* to exercise the use of reason, however they are not capable of acting upon it *in* childhood.

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[29] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, ed. Richard J Regan (Indianapolis.: Hackett, 2007), 198.

[30] Marek Tesar, Sophia Rodriguez, and David W Kupferman, "Philosophy and Pedagogy of Childhood, Adolescence and Youth," *Global Studies of Childhood* 6, no. 2 (May 9, 2016): 169–76, 169, https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610616647623.

[31] *Ibid*., 170.

[32] See e.g., Miles Hollingworth, *Saint Augustine of Hippo: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 91.

[33] John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education and of the Conduct of the Understanding*, ed. Ruth Weissbourd Grant and Nathan Tarcov (1693; repr., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1996), Sec. 2.

[34] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1690; repr., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), Sec. 56.

[35] Amelie Delage, "Children as Full Human Beings: A Radical Rethinking of Social and Political Transformation beyond Domination, Oppression, and Capitalist Exploitation" (Dissertation, 2020), 64, https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/a0d03420-50fe-411b-aa99-33db4e1673b3/content.

Rousseau focused more narrowly than Locke on the natural inclinations of children rather than their socially-acquired learning and habits. Indeed, he criticized Locke for his adultist approach, and for "always seeking the man in the child without thinking of what he is before being a man."[36] As such, the stages of childhood in Rousseau are not as forcefully conceived as stages of lack, as is the case with many other canonical thinkers. *Emile* emphasizes the positive characteristics of each stage. Nevertheless, there are ways that children ought to be prepared for socio-political life. Far from advocating for children's participation in public life in childhood, Rousseau hoped to maintain the protected sphere of childhood for as long as possible, guarding children from the corrupting influence of society. Here, the deficiency claim is implicit: children, because of their lack of education, are not yet able to distinguish between the goods and the evils of public life, nor are they yet able to assert their own will and challenge the prevailing authority.[37] These deficiencies, although circumstantial in Rousseau's account, justify their exclusion. Put in Arendtian terms, if Augustine sought to protect the "world against the child," Rousseau sought to protect "the child against the world."[38] While slightly different protectionist claims, both arguments, in effect, produce the same conclusion: children ought to be excluded from public life on the basis of some apparent deficiency.[39]

A coherent story emerges from this brief survey[40] of the treatment of childhood in political thought: children are excluded from democratic life because of their lack of capacity,

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[36] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York City: Basic Books, 1979), 157.

[37] *Ibid*., 27.

[38] Arendt, *Reflections on Little Rock*, 11.

[39] This conception of childhood as a series of developmental stages has remained relatively unchanged since Rousseau. In the early 20th century, Piaget, Kohlberg, and others in the developmental sciences refined 'stage theory' in a way that would be recognizable to the modern parent, educator, or child specialist.

[40] This is not an exhaustive survey of the entirety of Western political thought. While this would be beyond the scope of my investigation, there is also relatively little canonical work that deals explicitly with childhood as a social situation or predicament. An exception here might be Kant (see e.g., Mika LaVaque-Manty, "Kant's Children," *Social Theory and Practice* 32, no. 3 (2006): 365–88). Despite the fact that there are several works that investigate the connection between education and democracy, very few thinkers focus narrowly on the connection between the status of childhood and the expectations of public life.

broadly and variously defined, to contribute to it well. Per Aristotle and Aquinas, children are partially formed adults who cannot be said to exercise their capacities for reason. Following Augustine, children are not only incomplete adults but also genuine threats to public life because of their inherent, aggressive natures. While Rousseau emphasizes the unique virtues of childhood, he still conceives of the time of childhood as unavoidably dependent and vulnerable. These, I argue, are the central deficiency claims around which many other arguments for children's exclusion of public life orbit. Hobbes and Locke, for example, use the deficiency claim to justify children's relegation to the private realm. They also use it to validate the existence of—and necessity for—paternal authority. The goal of my thesis is not to disprove these particular claims, rather it is to illuminate what is made possible by rejecting them.

Reading children's literature as political theory demands that we look beyond the deficiency paradigm, toward something different. Children's literature is not ordinarily considered politically statused[41] because, as I have argued in this section, its audience is not ordinarily considered politically statused. Insofar as children are treated politically, they tend to be understood as future citizens: as blank slates upon whom the expectations, hopes, and anxieties of the reigning adult generation are written. What these moments in the history of political thought reveal is not an indifference towards children, but rather a childist inclination. Childism, as defined by Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, is used in the negative sense to describe prejudice and/or discrimination against children.[42] While the term is also used positively to describe the normative empowerment of children,[43] in this context I use 'childism' in the first sense: as a term that has "political resonance, something that can operate as *sexism* did to raise

[41] I use 'politically statused' here in a way that is interchangeable with 'politically significant'. I am referring to the social, political, and institutional processes that 'make' something or someone important within a larger socio-political context.

[42] Young-Bruehl, *Childism*, 4.

[43] Wall, "Human Rights in Light of Childhood," 524.

our political consciousness."[44] Childism does not have to represent a blatant disregard or hatred towards children, rather it can operate, as sexism does, as a way of understanding how judgements and assumptions are formed on the basis of a socially constructed category: age. It can manifest on an individual level (e.g., in relationships between parents and children) or on an institutional level (e.g., in educational policy). It can be banal or actively oppressive. In the history of political thought, childism appears via the democratic argument: children, because of their age and/or immaturity, lack the capacities necessary for participation in democratic life. This may be true in some or many particular cases. My basic point is that the baseline *presumption* of incapacity, particularly in the realm of democratic participation, is problematic and exclusionary. Democratic participation, as argued by Vivian E. Hamilton, constitutes a particular "decision-making context"[45] in which young people who are under the age of majority have demonstrated the ability to make "minimally competent voting decision [which] involves an adult-like[46] application and coordination of reasoning processes to make a choice that can be justified by a good-enough reason."[47] It is also a context, unlike driving a car or drinking alcohol, where the consequences of a young person's misinformed or "wrong" choice is less likely to cause serious harm. In the case of voting, for example, it is "more likely that errors would be randomly distributed."[48] One of the crucial points is that, in the history of political thought, there is little attention paid to the particularities of decision-making contexts. The history of political thought broadly assumes that most or all children and young people are incapable, dependent, and vulnerable until they reach some recognized age of maturity (i.e., seventeen for Aristotle,

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[44] Young-Bruehl, *Childism*, 5.

[45] Vivian E. Hamilton, "Considerations for Policymaking Affecting Adolescents in the Liberal Democracy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Children and the Law*, ed. James G. Dwyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 763, https://doi-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190694395.013.34.

[46] This is not to say that 'adult-like' is an unproblematic standard to which we ought to hold all people. To be an 'adult' is not necessarily to be rational or competent.

[47] Hamilton, "Considerations for Policymaking Affecting Adolescents in the Liberal Democracy," 736.

[48] *Ibid*., 763.

puberty for Augustine, the 'Age of Reason' for Rousseau). Why not, in the context of democratic participation, presume some baseline level of children's capacity instead?

Children's literature presumes children's capacity implicitly. This is not a function of the authorship, since most of children's literature tends to be written by adults. What unifies the genre is its attempted appeal to children. A 'good' work of children's literature must, at least minimally, resonate with its audience. Cullinan and Galda, in *Literature and the Child*, define the genre similarly: "A basic definition might state that it (children's literature) is books written for this particular audience; we might also add that it includes books that children and young adults enjoy and have made their own."[49] This definition opposes the famous argument made by Jacqueline Rose, who said that "there is no child behind the category of 'children's fiction', other than the one which the category itself sets in place, the one which it needs to believe there is for its own purposes."[50] This is partially true. Works of literature, unless written by a child, cannot be more than an adult's projection of childhood wants, desires, and fantasies. They are written from an adult's perspective, edited in adult-centered publishing houses, and are circulated and purchased like any other cultural product. However, children's literature, despite the adultist machine of production and consumption from which it is created, must at least seem plausible, reasonable, or entertaining to child audiences. While children themselves may not write or purchase these works, the essence of the genre ultimately depends on children's experiences *with them*. Also, despite the fact that adults cannot be said to write on behalf of children, they can, at the very least, purport to have once *been* children. Childhood is a social predicament through which they must have inevitably passed.

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[49] Lee Galda and Bernice E Cullinan, *Literature and the Child*, 5th ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002), 8.

[50] Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1992), 10.

The inclusion of children's literature on the agenda of political theorists is not so unorthodox if it is simply understood as part of the larger movement that seeks literature's inclusion in political theory. In the introduction to their edited collection *Literature and the Political Imagination*, John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister list several political theorists and political philosophers who have embraced literature to support their arguments, such as Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Rorty, and Martha Nussbaum. Other theorists who are considered part of the 'literary turn' in political theory include Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Jacques Derrida.[51] There are many notable works of political philosophy that read like literature, such as the Platonic dialogues, Thomas More's *Utopia*, and some of the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche.[52] There are even some recent attempts to develop methodological tools for literature's inclusion in works of political theory and political science more generally.[53] The history of political thought is rife with ancient, modern, and contemporary efforts to include literature as part of political theory. As argued by Lee Trepanier, securing literature's place in contemporary political science means that those who employ literature in their work must demonstrate "why literature matters to political science. To fail to do so is to exclude a rich resource from our study of politics and make us all the poorer political scientists for it."[54] By arguing for the use of children's literature in political theory, I hope that my work does its part in servicing Trepanier's aim.

It cannot be said that the medium of children's literature, simply by virtue of its genre, overhauls the deficiency-style assumptions that plague much of the history of democratic

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[51] Lee Trepanier, "What Can Political Science Learn from Literature," *The Political Science Reviewer* 44, no. 1 (August 21, 2020), 3.

[52] *Ibid.,* 2.

[53] See e.g., Hans-Ludwig Buchholz, "How to Use Literature in Political Theory: Five Questions of Methodology in 'Politics and Literature,'" *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, March 12, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1007/s41358-024-00369-7.

[54] Trepanier, "What Can Political Science Learn from Literature," 13.

thought. Instead, I argue that children's literature must be seriously considered in the context of democratic thought because it helps us break apart, scrutinize, and problematize the seemingly uncomplicated connection between childhood and public exclusion. In the following sections, I present a case study, a Blochian reading of A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*, to demonstrate (1) how this argument is supported by contemporary engagements in children's literature; and (2) how to undertake the methodological exercise of reading children's literature as political theory. First, I select and explain a theoretical framework that, although problematic, takes seriously both children and literature's political significance. Next, I engage the framework with a notable work of children's literature, one that has undeniable resonance with child audiences.

Part II | Ernst Bloch's Theory of Utopia and Childhood

The opening chapters of *The Principle of Hope*, the poetic foundations of a more structured theory of utopian consciousness, are mostly descriptive of the childhood experience. Bloch begins the book by describing our earliest infant longings: "From early on we are searching. All we do is crave, cry out. Do not have what we want."[55] The child is constituted of *nothing but* an unconstrained sense of wishing, grasping "at everything to find out what is means"[56] with restless and insatiable curiosity. For Bloch, the child is driven to pursue knowledge and meaning by a kind of wild, immature human impulse. The child projects this impulse back into the material world through play, which Bloch understands to be, in itself, transformational: "As he wishes, play changes the child himself, his friends, all his things into strangely familiar stock, the floor of the playroom itself becomes a forest full of wild animals or

[55] Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 21.
[56] *Ibid*., 21.

a lake on which every chair is a boat."[57] The imaginations of children are organic and spontaneous; they are guided by vague ideas of the safety of home and the adventure of "beautiful foreign lands."[58] There is a spatial and temporal sense of 'here' as well as an imaginative land of 'there' that is "out of sight of school and home."[59] The child at most times "moves away from the place or the state in which they find themselves,"[60] wishing for a dreamed existence glimpsed in the utopian 'there'. Bloch does not delve into the contents of what 'there' might look like, for it is changing and intangible. The 'there' contains within it the wish-contents of the child's imagination, the realistic and the fantastical both, where everything is transformed and different.

Bloch does not suggest that the experience is totally immersive. The child does not live in a state of utopia, rather they are offered "deep and brief glimpses into otherness."[61] Through "colorful windows,"[62] the child sees the world, not as it is, but in light of what it possibly could be. Bloch adds that children can glimpse otherness "at any time,"[63] suggesting that children are able to tap into a kind of utopian consciousness more quickly and more intuitively than adults. Children are therefore *disposed* to utopian thinking. Moreover, the utopian thinking with which they engage resembles a purer, less commercialized state of humanity; it is truer than the utopian thinking of later life.

At a certain early-adolescent stage, Bloch says that the child's fantasies begin to emerge from places other than their own imagination: "Clearly, such fantasies do not only emanate from the depths of the mind, but just as often from newspapers, from adventure books with their

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[57] *Ibid*., 22.
[58] *Ibid*., 22.
[59] *Ibid*., 23.
[60] *Ibid*., 23.
[61] *Ibid*., 22.
[62] *Ibid*., 22.
[63] *Ibid*., 24.

wonderfully glossy pages."[64] The contents of the child's wishing situates itself in the material world, taking the shape of "the future image of the life which youth expects."[65] Wishes become more contained, less far-reaching, and more reflective of the social and material world of which the child is a part. Anticipatory dreams become entangled with "regretful dreams"[66] egged on by bourgeois consumer culture, and the youthful desire to transform through play becomes increasingly squashed. The more mature young person does not stop dreaming, however the wish-contents of their dreams inevitably change. Dreaming is more resigned to the current day: "And it thus also demonstrates, of course, that it merely wishes to break out of the world somewhat, not [...] change it."[67] The implication is that the child changes as they become accustomed to the social world as it is. They become initiated into the 'here', becoming increasingly resigned to it; the contents of their dreams have "ceased to be so fantastic."[68] Bloch, like Rousseau, holds the uninhibited anticipatory knowledge of young children in high esteem. Young children are creative agents who routinely act upon their utopian impulses. If utopia is a future glimpsed by children, then it follows that the 'seers' of utopia, the creators of the imagined 'no place' that has not yet been "set up"[69] in the world, are considered valuable 'knowers' in this particular sense.

This reading is complicated by Bloch's inconsistent treatment of the figure of the child in the rest of *The Principle of Hope.* While Bloch celebrates the nascent capacity of children to glimpse utopia, he nevertheless maintains some part of the deficiency-style claim. The richness of the childhood experience and the special kind of utopian knowledge held by children is said to exist apart from the social and political world. When children become old enough to become part

[64] *Ibid*., 23.
[65] *Ibid*., 27.
[66] *Ibid*., 30.
[67] *Ibid*., 33.
[68] *Ibid*., 25.
[69] *Ibid.,* 29.

of it, Bloch assumes their infinite malleability. Similar to Locke and Rousseau, Bloch can be interpreted as advocating for the exclusion of children from the public sphere on the basis that they might too easily conform to the norms and expectations of the given world.

To develop this criticism further, more must be said about Bloch's relationship to Romanticism. For Bloch, the Romantics were "enslaved by the past."[70] They "thwarted the undeniable progressive tendencies"[71] present in their times and contributed to a stagnation of emancipatory thought. They lost themselves in "antiquarian images,"[72] in "the immemorial, in myth, as a stance against the future."[73] While Bloch argues that German Romanticism had some progressive elements, its desired future-image ultimately sought a "feeling of homeland"[74] that reached back to an "overprized past."[75] He argued that powerful Romantic feelings stifled the emancipatory moment of the time. They "seduced the Not-Yet-Conscious"[76] under the "continuing spell of static living and thinking."[77] The Romantic view on children, notably adopted by Rousseau and Locke too, is that the child is truer to nature and closer to God than adults: "Heaven lies about us in our infancy!"[78] The Romantic child has a kind and quiet demeanor, a curious spirit, and a sense of pure innocence in the face of the adult world of corruption and greed. In Romantic poetry and literature, children hold a mirror to the present society. They serve to criticize the harshness and materiality of the given world by appealing to the wisdom and beauty of a lost childhood past. The authors and poets of the Romantic era saw,

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[70] *Ibid.,* 135.
[71] *Ibid*., 135.
[72] *Ibid*., 135.
[73] *Ibid*., 135.
[74] *Ibid*., 136.
[75] *Ibid*., 136.
[76] *Ibid*., 136.
[77] *Ibid*., 139.
[78] Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality', ll. 110-19 as quoted in Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts, The Edinburgh Critical Edition of the Major Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 64.

as Bloch did, the figure of the child as imbued with an inherent knowledge and imaginativeness. In functioning as a kind of "seer blest"[79] the child serves an instrumental 'godlike' function in pointing out the flawed ways of adult life. It is a thoroughly idealized construction, one that serves the regressive tendencies that Bloch identifies of Romanticism more generally.

Despite his critique of the Romantics for obstructing the emancipatory possibilities of their time, Bloch conceptualized the child, an undoubtedly foundational figure in his oeuvre, in a similar way. The Blochian child, like the Wordsworthian child, is a sage and passive creature of Becoming who, at least temporarily, glimpses the New World. While in Bloch the child aims forward, the child in the Romantic tradition aims backwards, to the "myth of the Golden Age."[80] In spite of this difference, the child in Bloch ultimately serves the same instrumental function as the Romantic child. As 'seers', they undertake the essential role of critique. The figure of the Blochian child is not altogether straightforward. On one hand, the Blochian child is a self-originating source of emancipatory knowledge claims. On the other, she is a fantasy: an embodied projection of an adult philosopher's vision of childhood. This is, perhaps, an unavoidable problem that must plague any adult person interested in writing about the predicament of childhood or the status of the child subject.

Like the philosophers that preceded him, Bloch attempts to make legible the experience of childhood from his adult perspective, for the purpose of critique on his own terms. The result is a depiction of a faceless and thoroughly generalizable child figure who, despite their centrality in Bloch's theory, is conceptually one-dimensional. There is no rich inner 'world' of children that is discernible through their own self-explanation, rather the "world *begins* with our own youth."[81] For Bloch, childhood is a utopian moment in a broader life cycle. Apart from their

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[79] *Ibid*., 317.
[80] Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 9.
[81] *Ibid.,* 27.

fleeting utopian knowings, no part of the diverse potentials of the child's conscious being are part of Bloch's depiction of the child subject. The child is a static figure who thinks in only one way, valued for one instrumental reason. They are grateful to be Becoming and are conscious (even happy) of their incompleteness: "As it progresses, youth acquires the gratitude of becoming, and the birth-giving wondrous image of [that] which is to be formed."[82] Children are emblematic of the Becoming in Bloch, not considered for their own sake; they do not interpret or engage with the social and political world as it is, rather they exist apart from it. While the child and their imaginative visions might play a conceptual role in liberating the utopian impulse from the materiality that shapes adult longings, the concept of the child in Bloch is blank and too broadly generalized. Conceptualizing the child in this way is not genuinely emancipatory. It holds back a more progressive understanding of the child as a dynamic social agent capable of change and transformation.

Despite the limitations of Bloch's account, his treatment of the figure of the child in his theory of utopia is not altogether irredeemable. As I argue in the following section, if we understand Bloch's treatment of the child in light of his views on children's fictions, a plausible story emerges that serves to help displace the deficiency account of childhood. To develop this point further, the following section will engage Bloch's theory of childhood and utopia with A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*.

Part III | Case Study: The Utopia at Pooh Corner

My attempt to draw together Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* and Milne's world of *Pooh* requires further explanation. In order to engage in the exercise of reading children's literature as political theory, the piece of literature that I select should not only be resonant with its child

[82] *Ibid.,* 120.

audience, but it should also be compatible with the relevant theoretical framework. A work of children's literature that might be plausibly utopian, for example, is most suited to having the Blochian framework imposed upon it. This raises the obvious question: Can Milne's *Pooh* works be considered 'utopian' in any meaningful way?

Ruth Levitas argues that a work can be considered plausibly utopian along three dimensions: content, form, and function.[83] I will consider *Pooh*'s content first. In one of the first academic volumes published on the genre of utopian children's literature, Hintz and Ostry establish useful criteria for distinguishing 'children's literature' from 'utopian' children literature: "An awareness of social organization [...] is necessary for a work to be called utopian; not every text written for young readers that shows a positive environment can be classified as such."[84] They also argue that utopias must be structured in a somewhat enclosed way; there must be some temporal or spatial understanding of being able to "come in or out"[85] of utopia. A work of children's fiction that depicts a "hedonistic fantasy"[86] or an ideal "happy family,"[87] while depicting some potentially utopian elements, does not constitute a utopia *per se*. Utopia, even within the realm of children's fiction, is more than wish-fulfillment. While these criteria could be reasonably debated and contested, I will set this issue aside for now.

The Hundred-Acre-Wood, the idyllic British forest in which the *Pooh* characters live, has a loose but consistent social and spatial structure. The first page of *Winnie-the-Pooh* lays out a map of the Wood. Christopher Robin, the leader of the stuffed creatures that live there, has supposedly drawn it out with the help of the book's illustrator, Ernest H. Shepard (whom Christopher calls Mr. Shepard). According to Milne, the layout of the Wood is identical to that of

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[83] Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, vol. 3 (1990; repr., Bern: Peter Lang Publishing Group, 2010).

[84] Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry, *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 4.

[85] *Ibid.,* 4.

[86] *Ibid.,* 4.

[87] *Ibid.,* 4.

Ashdown Forest in East Sussex, where he, his wife, and his son Christopher Robin Milne would visit and play.[88] In *Winnie-the-Pooh*, the Wood provides everything that its inhabitants need to survive. The bees and plants make enough food (i.e., honey, thistles, and haycorns) for everyone, the water is clean and drinkable, and the trees provide useful shelter for every creature who needs a home. When strong winds, floods, and blizzards trouble the inhabitants of the Wood, Nature, personified consistently throughout the works as a unified, omniscient entity, always provides materials for the creatures to make the supplies they need. There is never any sense of lack or want for material things in the Wood, and the creatures do not need to labour for their living; Nature always gives enough. As such, the creatures of the forest have nothing but leisure time to learn, play, and spend time together. When conflict or trouble arises in the Wood, the creatures know that Christopher Robin, a wise and innovative preschool boy, is able to resolve it. He is the benevolent, widely-beloved leader of the Wood, mobilizing the creatures for projects (e.g., finding a new house for Owl after a Very Blustery Day, rescuing Piglet from the Great Flood), mounting expeditions (e.g., to the North Pole, to a Very Dangerous Place to capture Heffalumps and Woozles), and taking care of the creatures when they become sick (e.g., fixing Eeyore's Very Sad Condition, providing Tigger his Strengthening Medicine). But Christopher Robin is not the only decision-maker in the Wood. When conflict arises at the end of *The House at Pooh Corner*, the creatures gather together to deliberate and consider collective motions: "Everybody will meet at the House at Pooh Corner to pass a Resolution By Order Keep to the Left Signed Rabbitt."[89] In this fantastical agrarian world, the conditions of production are not entirely cast aside: there is no shelter nor food provision in the Wood that generates spontaneously. It is either consumed directly from its natural source (see e.g., Chapter I: In

[88] Christopher Milne, *The Enchanted Places* (1974; repr., London: Pan Macmillan, 2016), 69.
[89] A.A. Milne, *The Complete Tales & Poems of Winnie-The-Pooh* (1926; repr., New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2001), 327.

Which We are Introduced to Winnie-the-Pooh and Some Bees, wherein Pooh runs out of honey and must find more from an angry bee hive) or through the manual labour of its inhabitants (see e.g., Chapter VI: In Which Eeyore has a Birthday and Gets Two Presents, wherein a cake is baked for Eeyore). In other chapters, the inhabitants of the Wood participate in the construction of Eeyore's home, and later in the re-construction of Owl's home post-Blustery Day. While the Hundred-Acre-Wood is not a fully conceived society—the conditions for its *re*production are, for perhaps obvious reasons, cast aside—it nevertheless maintains the essence of a self-conscious, collectively organized society in the way that Hintz and Ostrey describe.

The form of the *Pooh* stories also meet Hintz and Ostrey's second criteria for the utopian contents of children's fiction: it is 'enclosed' in a particular spatial-temporal sense. Milne, like More in his *Utopia*, is written into the fiction; he is the narrator who, speaking in the first-person, is responsible for transporting his readers to the utopian world. At the beginning of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, Milne kicks off the fiction by telling his son, Christopher, a story about his stuffed toy bear, Pooh.

> "What about a story?" said Christopher Robin.
> "*What* about a story?" I said.
> "Could you very sweetly tell Winnie-the-Pooh one?"
> "I suppose I could," I said. "What sort of stories does he like?"
> "About himself. Because he's *that* sort of Bear."
> "Oh, I see."
> "So could you very sweetly?"
> "I'll try," I said.
> So I tried.[90]

It is from this point that the embedded narrative begins: "Once upon a time, a very long time ago now, about last Friday, Winnie-the-Pooh lived in a forest."[91] Milne's story, spanning two books and twenty chapters, does not venture outside of the Hundred-Acre-Wood until the end of *The*

[90] *Ibid.,* 2.
[91] *Ibid.,*, 2.

House of Pooh Corner, where "Christopher Robin and Pooh Come to an Enchanted Place, and We Leave Them There". In this final chapter, the creatures become aware that Christopher Robin "will be going away."[92] After his final tea party with the creatures of the Wood, Christopher Robin takes Pooh to the very top of the Forest, to a special mossy place called Galleons Lap, where he tells Pooh about "people called Kings and Queens and something called Factors, and a place called Europe."[93] Christopher tells Pooh that he cannot do Nothing anymore with his friends in the Woods, because he has to begin his first year of school. There is a profound sense of loss in this final chapter, a mourning for Christopher Robin's unburdened, undisciplined early-childhood self in the Woods. After knighting Pooh "Sir Pooh de Bear, most faithful of all [the] knights,"[94] Christopher takes Pooh's paw and jumps to his feet: "So they went off together. But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on top of the Forest, a little boy and his Bear will always be playing."[95] In providing a definitive start and end point, Milne restricts the bounds of the utopia of the Hundred-Acre-Wood to a limited quasi-fictional moment in time: Christopher Robin's preschool years.

Winnie-the-Pooh is also distinctly utopian in its form and function. Having already established that the Hundred-Acre-Wood is in fact a self-conscious society, it is relatively unproblematic to make the determination that, insofar as the *Pooh* works provide "a description of a good society, leaving aside the question of possibility,"[96] they are utopian in their form. The question of its utopian *function* provides a richer discussion, one that must begin with the context within which the Pooh works were written. *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* were written in 1924 and 1926, in the period of peace between World War I and World War II.

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[92] *Ibid.,* 326.
[93] *Ibid.,* 337.
[94] *Ibid.,* 341.
[95] *Ibid.,* 344.
[96] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 5.

Having served in both, Milne felt connected to his identity as a soldier. Christopher Robin Milne later said in his autobiography that his father "was always a Soldier to me, indeed to us all."[97] Francesca Gorini argues that the British interwar context is important to understanding the social function of the *Pooh* books at the time. She describes the series as escapist insofar as it purposefully diverted the readers' attention "from an international scenario of political and economic unrest."[98] She usefully characterizes *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* as instances of 'domestic fantasy'. The almost instantaneous success of *Winnie-the-Pooh* speaks to this point. Milne's stories rose to the historic moment of unease and disillusionment in interwar Britain; its playful escapism was welcomed by children and adults alike. As argued by Hunt, it is significant that the Hundred-Acre-Wood is a real and recognizable place in Britain; it is a "secure and *comprehensible* country. Here, nothing can *really* go wrong; from the point of view of the characters the worst that can happen is getting wet or temporarily running out of honey."[99] The Hundred-Acre-Wood depicts a British village untouched by war, where Nature is left to its own devices and children play with their stuffed friends without fear of interference. In this way it functions, as Levitas says, "as presenting some kind of goal."[100] While the Hundred-Acre-Wood as a serious alternative social organization is unrealizable in many obvious ways, it can still provide the outlines of "what the goal should be."[101] It is the education of a certain kind of desire for a more peaceful, more playful world.

This last point serves as a useful starting point for the next part of my analysis. Given that *Pooh* can be understood as utopian children's fiction, it is reasonable to say that the work is

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[97] Milne, *The Enchanted Places*, 39.

[98] Francesca Gorini, "Alan Alexander Milne's Pooh Books: From Literary Origin to Disnification," *Cultural Perspectives - Journal for Literary and British Cultural Studies in Romania*, no. 14 (2009): 59.

[99] Peter Hunt, "Winnie-The-Pooh and Domestic Fantasy," in *Stories and Society*, ed. Dennis Butts (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 114.

[100] Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 6.

[101] *Ibid.,* 6.

compatible with the Blochian framework. But aside from utopia being, in itself, a political construct, what might the engagement of these two works say about the children's political status? In the following section, I argue that *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* serve as moments of concrete utopia that could serve an emancipatory pedagogical function, one that re-centers the figure of the child as an agent of change.

Part IV | Case Study: In Which Pooh Bear Tells us About Transformation

Relative to the 'serious' tradition of utopian literature, works of children's fiction are uniquely and advantageously positioned as a kind of 'first' utopia. As one of the earliest situations in which the child encounters a fully laid out, cohesive social structure, the utopias that are detailed in children's fiction can help spark a child's social dreaming. It does not really matter that children's utopias are often completely unrealizable insofar as their functioning often depends on magic, mythical creatures, and implausible economic arrangements. Utopian children's fiction, in providing a sense of time and place where the world is transformed and material needs are always met, provides an imaginary setting within which the child can safely explore their own sense of agency, as well as their capacity for transforming the world around them. This is, I argue, one possible political function of children's literature. It is yet another way that children's literature *is* and *is made* political. This point can be made more clearly by turning back to the contents of *Pooh*.

The Hundred-Acre-Wood is a child's utopia in the sense that advanced age does not have any bearing on social, legal, or political status; it is a world where children and their child-like animal friends are fully emancipated and free to move about the world as they wish. While Christopher Robin is undoubtedly granted more status than the animals in the Wood, this has

nothing to do with his age. He is central in the embedded utopia of *Pooh* because he is the central in his father's storytelling. The Hundred-Acre-Wood is 'the world' if it were ideally conceived by five-year-old Christopher Robin Milne, transcribed and elaborated upon by his father. Pooh, Piglet, Owl, Rabbit, Tigger, Kanga, and Baby Roo were all real stuffed toys with corresponding personalities and rich backstories, as developed in Christopher's imagination:

> It started in the nursery; it started with me. It could really start nowhere else, for the toys lived in the nursery and they were mine and I played with them. And as I played with them and talked to them and gave them voices to answer with, so they began to breathe. My mother joined me and she and I and the toys played together, and gradually more life, more character flowed into them, until they reached a point at which my father could take over. Then, as the stories were written, the cycle was repeated. The Pooh in my arms, the Pooh sitting opposite me at the breakfast table, was a Pooh who had climbed trees in search of honey, who had got stuck in a rabbit hole, who was a bear of no brain at all…[102]

The Hundred-Acre-Wood was tangibly Christopher Robin Milne's 'first' utopia (or one of his first glimpses at utopia, if we are speaking in Blochian terms) as it played out on the floor of his nursery with his mother and father. To a more limited extent, the stories of fictional Christopher Robin can be understood as an extension of real-life Christopher Robin Milne's imagination. While Christopher's utopia is undoubtedly cleaned up and filtered through A.A. Milne, understanding the narrative through this lens reveals something important about the figure of the child in the *Pooh* fictions: The child in Milne's utopia is not an abstract figure. Christopher Robin stands-in for a real child and his imaginative capacities. The figure of the child in *Pooh* is a social agent capable of transforming the world around him. He has a keen sense of social awareness, a valued wealth of knowledge that is acted upon and challenged, and a radical imaginative capacity for problem-solving that transcends the material limits of the given world. More textual support is necessary to evidence this point.

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[102] Milne, *The Enchanted Places*, 84.

In the eighth chapter of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, "In Which Christopher Robin Leads an Expotition to the North Pole," Christopher Robin recruits his stuffed animal friends for an Adventure in the forest. Christopher Robin makes all relevant decisions in the story; he determines when the Expotition is to begin,[103] he decides which sites are Dangerous Places,[104] he chooses when they are to eat Provisions,[105] and he confirms that Pooh has, in fact, found the North Pole (which is, incidentally, a large pole-shaped stick).[106] His voice carries weight with the animals; he is listened to and respected as a competent navigator of the Hundred-Acre-Wood. Importantly, the most revered dimension of his knowledge is his imagination: "Thank you, Christopher Robin. You're the only one who seems to understand about tails. They don't think–that's what's the matter with some of these others. They've no imagination."[107] The resolution of the story ultimately depends upon Christopher Robin's ingenuity and imagination, as do many other chapters. He is the most esteemed 'knower' of this utopian world. This point is illustrated particularly clearly in another chapter, when Piglet, surrounded by water, contemplates his predicament:

> "There's Pooh," he thought to himself. "Pooh hasn't much Brain, but he never comes to any harm [...] There's Owl. Owl hasn't exactly got Brain, but he Knows Things. He would know the Right Thing to Do when Surrounded by Water. There's Rabbit. He hasn't Learnt in Books, but he can always Think of a Clever Plan [...] But I wonder what Christopher Robin would do?"[108]

Even when he is absent, the will of Christopher Robin shapes the narrative. His imaginative knowledge, the most complete and most revered of all the inhabitants of the Wood, frees the other creatures from their worries and problems. The characterization of Christopher Robin

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[103] Milne, *The Complete Tales & Poems of Winnie-The-Pooh,* 114.
[104] *Ibid.,* 116.
[105] *Ibid.,* 118.
[106] *Ibid.,* 125.
[107] *Ibid.,*125.
[108] *Ibid.,* 130-131.

speaks to Milne's reverence for the kind of informal and imaginative knowledge that comes naturally to children of preschool age. This is also exemplified by Milne's contrasting treatment of Rabbit and Owl, who, despite having more "Brain"[109] than the other animals of the Wood, are frequently criticized for "never understanding anything."[110] Standing-in to represent a more formal process of 'rational' adult thinking, Rabbit and Owl's knowledge is considered lesser to Christopher Robin's in the Hundred-Acre-Wood. Milne presents the more idiosyncratic knowledge of the child figure, of Christopher Robin and his sidekick Pooh Bear, as more revelatory.

Like Bloch, Milne recognizes the inherently utopian character of childhood. There is a kind of knowledge inherent to the experience of childhood that is well suited to cast a critical eye on the pretension of the adult world. While Milne's *Pooh* stories are undeniably works of fairytale, the narratives within them contain an emancipatory grain for the child subject. The Hundred-Acre-Wood depicts a world, unlike our own, that not only *includes* children in decision-making, but meaningfully *centers* them in the process. It is a world where the child, devoid of material need, can explore the natural world, transform the social one, and engage in decision-making on their own terms. Christopher Robin is capable of transforming his reality if it does not seem just, kind, or wise: he is not only a "competent interpreter of the social world"[111] but a transformative *maker* of it. While the coming-to-life of stuffed creatures might not be possible, much of the child-led and child-conceived *Pooh* world very well could be. One could easily imagine a utopian world where Nature, respected and properly cared for, provides enough for everyone, leisure time to do Nothing abounds, and children take part in decision-making.

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[109] *Ibid.,* 295.
[110] *Ibid.,* 295.
[111] Peter Francis Harvey and Annette Lareau, "Studying Children Using Ethnography: Heightened Challenges and Balancing Acts," *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique* 146, no. 1 (April 2020): 17. https://doi.org/10.1177/0759106320908220.

The emancipatory treatment of the child subject and the potential realizability of the contents of Milne's utopia are not the only things that distinguish the texts as concretely utopian. Milne's utopia, like many other works of children's fiction, serves the pedagogical function of teaching 'lessons'. Aided by its episodic structure, *Pooh* attempts to do some of the concrete utopian work of: (1) breaking down the "contents of fear;"[112] (2) providing "open space [for] its object which is to be realized and which realizes itself forward;"[113] and (3) exploring the abstract principles for human flourishing. I will explain each of these components in more detail with the goal of illustrating that these elements are not unique to *Pooh*, and can reasonably be generalized to most works of utopian children's literature that are used socially to 'teach something' to young people.

For Bloch, utopia is everywhere around us. It is contained in the past, present, and future, in the Not-Yet-Conscious of all people, emerging "as a concrete product from the process of its own creation."[114] The present moment, including its various socio-economic structures and cultural fictions, conceals within itself potentially utopian possibilities. Utopian children's literature does the important work of bringing to light these possibilities for both their intended demographic, children, and for the adults that take part in their readings. The experience of reading books like *Pooh*, which are intended to be read *to* children of preschool age, is that it creates an intergenerational space for dialogue and wonder: it is an intimate, meditative exercise. While *Pooh* might not provide a strict social utopia insofar as it is meant to inspire sustained political reflection between adult and child, it can nevertheless be considered, as Frederic Jameson said of utopian narratives, "an object of meditation, analogous to the riddles or koan of

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[112] Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 5.
[113] *Ibid.,* 156.
[114] Keith Tester and Michael Hviid Jacobsen, *Utopia: Social Theory and the Future* (1960; repr., Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2012), 34.

the various mystical traditions, or the aporias of classical philosophy, whose function is to provide a fruitful bewilderment."[115] Jameson's description is particularly apt here in considering what might be concretely utopian about *Pooh* and works children's fiction more generally. Although the Hundred-Acre-Wood is not and cannot possibly be, as Bloch said, "a real and concrete final state which can be achieved politically,"[116] the concrete power of the text lies in the richness of the meditative experience of the child *with it*. The point is not to have a perfect utopia capable of 'fixing' any given set of social problems. For the target demographic, it is enough that *Pooh* provides a sense of time and place devoid of any material need, where utopian possibilities abound for the child in a safe and developmentally appropriate setting. The child's experience of 'there', of a better 'here', of the Not-Yet-Becoming, of the "future image of the life which youth expects,"[117] could constitute a concealed utopian possibility. Children, as a politically, legally, and socially marginalized[118] category of people, are caught squarely within the bourgeois order that conceals emancipatory thought. The experience of utopian children's fiction, as fantastical as it possibly can be, creates, as Eva von Redecker might argue, crucial early "interstitial" spaces of deep hope and possibility that occur at all times in all sorts of places. Together in reading utopian children's writing, adults and children engage in a transformative meditative exercise which brings out images of a 'better world' to which the child is drawn. Perhaps they may even come to expect it in later life.

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[115] Hintz and Ostrey, *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults,* 4.
[116] Bloch*, The Principle of Hope,* xxviii.
[117] *Ibid.,* 27.
[118] Children are 'marginalized' in this context by virtue of their limited and contingent citizenship rights, their lack of participation rights in legislative and judicial matters that concern them, the limited means by which they can express dissent to the prevailing social and political order, and the social norms that permit, to a limited extent, the domination of adults over children. Given that their marginalized predicament is temporally bound and eventually surmountable, children are not marginalized in the same way as racialized peoples, some people with disabilities, or the poor. However, the marginalization of these groups are connected by many of the same logics of oppression that marginalize children.

Thus, the 'concrete' function of utopian children's fiction is not about the actionability of the texts *per se*. Much of the concreteness of works like *Pooh* lies in its pedagogical function, which is an aspect of abstract utopian thought which Bloch overlooks. As a work of fairy tale, Bloch might recognize moments of concrete utopia in the *Pooh* works (e.g., the lack of material need, the benevolence of Nature, the safety and tranquility of a play place for children all has connection to the Real-Possible) but would likely cast them aside as mere "visualizing abstractions"[119] or as "abstract escapism."[120] The utopian function would be "immaturely present"[121] at best, since there is no solid (that is, real and material) subject behind it.[122] But there are very real elements of anticipation present in the form of children's writing itself and the experience of children and adults with it. The experience of reading children's fiction is often squarely *for* the purpose of dissolving the "contents of fear,"[123] allowing the child to sleep, to dream, to play and imagine. It is *for* providing space for an imaginative construction of the possible contents of utopia, which "realizes itself forward"[124] in the child's conscious mind. Notably, it is *for* the experience of the child who, perhaps encountering for one of the first times a cohesive and laid-out social structure in literary form, can decide for themselves what kinds of elements of utopian life fit *their* understanding of a 'good life'. This is not to say that children's interpretations of their actual social worlds are any less real or important than their interpretations of the kinds of social worlds presented in literature. The 'firstness' of the experience of reading children's literature is less important than the overarching natality that characterizes this early period of social dreaming. If possibilities for a 'good life' are presented in the actual social world that they encounter, then children's literature could be said to expand

[119] *Ibid.,* 4.
[120] *Ibid.,* 14.
[121] *Ibid.,* 145.
[122] *Ibid.,* 145.
[123] *Ibid.*, 5.
[124] *Ibid.,* 156.

the list of said possibilities, perhaps change the character of said possibilities, or bring them to life in a particularly appealing or tangible way. While the contents of a child's utopia might not be perfectly connected or aligned with the Real-Possible of the 'actual' social, economic, or political world, it is nevertheless connected with the child's more imaginative Real-Possible, which ultimately reaches for the kind of 'good life' to which all utopias strive.

This reading ultimately depends on a regard for the child subject as a competent interpreter of the Real-Possible: of the life which must connect to their social dreaming to yield concrete utopia in the Blochian sense. Christopher Robin provides a useful model in this respect. A child who has to answer to no authority, Christopher Robin acts out any whim that seems to him fair, reasonable, inventive, or fun. The Hundred-Acre-Wood is his playground, and in it he maintains a strong sense of agency. It is a distinctly political kind of agency because he demonstrates an awareness of his relationship to his broader social and political world: he is aware of his potential to engage with the external reality of which he is part, and he can enact change within it. Christopher Robin is capable of making different any situation in the Wood, and he can propose, in a pseudo-democratic way, actions and reforms before ever leaving the 'Enchanted Place' and initiating himself into the What-Is of adult bourgeois life. He is a complete Being imbued with an innate and emancipatory knowledge; he knows of the 'good life' relative to his own existence and experience.

Children's literature, as exemplified by *Pooh,* tends to assume the capacity of children to participate meaningfully in the communities of which they are a part. Their participation in public life, following the Lundy Model, can be understood in terms of four crucial elements: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. For almost a decade, the Lundy Model has been the dominant framework for conceptualizing children's participation rights. Laura Lundy argues that

it is wrong to understand participation rights solely in terms of 'the right to be heard'. Children's participation, if it is to be undertaken meaningfully in the public realm, depends on (1) *Space*: "Children must be given the opportunity to express a view;" (2) *Voice*: "Children must be facilitated to express their views;" (3) *Audience*: "The view must be listened to;" and (4) *Influence*: "The view must be acted upon, as appropriate."[125] Lundy's is a useful framework for understanding the extent to which children's literature subverts the deficiency paradigm advanced in the history of political thought. The Hundred-Acre-Wood is a space where all creatures, children and animals alike, can actively contribute to the realization and flourishing of their community. They are facilitated in expressing their concerns and feelings, both through active deliberation and through the encouragement of their closest friends. Their views, no matter how silly, are listened to: the mutual respect among the creatures, despite some differences in understanding or breakdowns in communication, speaks to overarching community values of mutuality and plurality. Their ideas are not only listened to but frequently acted upon after careful exchange and consideration:

> "Piglet, I have decided something."
> "What have you decided, Pooh?"
> "I have decided to catch a Heffalump."
> Pooh nodded his head several times as he said this, and waited for Piglet to say "How?" or "Pooh, you couldn't" or something helpful of that sort, but Piglet said nothing. The fact was Piglet was wishing that *he* had thought about it first.
> "I shall do it," said Pooh, after waiting a little longer, "by means of a trap. And it must be a Cunning Trap, so you will have to help me, Piglet."
> "Pooh," said Piglet, feeling quite happy again now, "I will." And then he said "How shall we do it?" and Pooh said, "That's just it. How?" And then they sat together to think it out.[126]

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[125] Laura Lundy, "Voice Is Not Enough: Conceptualizing Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child," *British Educational Research Journal* 33, no. 6 (December 2007): 933.

[126] Milne, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Winnie-the-Pooh*, 54.

What springs from the assumption that children have something meaningful to contribute in their communities is the kind of Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence advanced by Lundy. It is a significant departure from the deficiency-style paradigm that is characteristic of much of the history of political thought. Works of children's literature, in particular those that are utopian in nature, can carve out brief, interstitial moments to explore possibilities for children's participation in social and political worlds. They can depict fully agential children (or, in the case of *Pooh*, child-like animal friends) who, in the context of a community that assumes their capacities implicitly, flourish. Perhaps if Bloch understood the child subject as we do Christopher Robin, as a competent observer and maker of social and political worlds, then he too might recognize the emancipatory possibilities concealed in children's stories like *Pooh*.

Discussion: Objections and Limitations

If the child subject is understood as nothing more than a future adult, or if adults are understood as the only capable interpreters of the social world, then a reasonable case can be made that the fairytales of childhood are abstract, pacifying reproductions of the status quo. What might the Hundred-Acre-Wood mean to an adult who, entrenched in the What-Is, understands the contents of *Pooh* in terms of its potential realisability? From this perspective, in Blochian terms, the world of *Pooh* is "wishful thinking [...] the wish is not accompanied by a will to change anything."[127] There is no real political future to which the work aims, it "plays around and gets lost in an Empty-Possible."[128] It would be a stretch to say that the fairytales of childhood 'stay with' adults throughout their lives, impacting the way they interact with the Real-Possible. For most adults, the stories of their childhood are long forgotten, or at least are

[127] Ruth Levitas, "Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia," *Utopian Studies* 1, no. 2 (1990): 15.

[128] Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 144.

not considered part of their political consciousness. *Winnie-the-Pooh* is therefore unlikely to spur individuals to political action in the way that Marx or Bloch might hope. It is not even an "imaginative vision of the *telos* or end at which social life aims."[129] While there might be something relevantly and concretely utopian about the sense of hope that children's utopias inspire in adults, especially for the children in their care, the connection between that sense of hope and its "link with the potentiality within the world"[130] is unlikely to be seriously considered. As I have demonstrated in *Pooh*, there are undeniably anticipatory elements in the utopian children's narratives. However, these elements are unlikely to be meaningfully acted upon, or even seriously engaged with, by the adult reader.

The works of *Pooh*, having been written by an adult with minimal child input, also represent an adult's conception of the time of childhood: the works cannot be said to authentically represent children *qua* children. The experience of childhood can only ever be authentically relayed by children themselves. While all adults will have inevitably passed through a period of childhood, they are nevertheless temporally distanced from it. As argued by Victoria Ford Smith in *Between Generations: Collaborative Authorship in the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (2019), the recognition of children as agents requires models of authorship that support adult-child collaboration in the writing of children's literature: "adults' partnerships with young auditors, writers, illustrators, reviewers, and co-conspirators reveal that the agentic, creative child was not only a figure but an actor, vital to authorial practice."[131] Without the substantial involvement of children in every step of the writing process, children's literature can only depict so much of the experience of childhood and the feelings, anxieties, longings, and

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[129] Northrup Frye, "Varieties of Literary Utopias," *Daedalus* 94, no. 2 (1965), 323.
[130] Ernst Bloch, *On Karl Marx*, trans. John Maxwell (1971; repr., Brooklyn: Verso, 2018), 172.
[131] Victoria Ford Smith, *Between Generations: Collaborative Authorship in the Golden Age of Children's Literature*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017).

aspirations that are distinct to it. In this paper, I have done my best to avoid general claims to the experience of childhood or to some unified "fantasy of childhood."[132] However, given that I have not consulted *with* children in a project that is centrally about their agency, subjectivities, and experiences, my project has been limited.

The problem of adult authorship is related to the problem of epistemic authority when it comes to children. As argued by Michael Baumtrog, there is "unavoidable social and epistemic inequality between [children] and adults [...]."[133] This concern is especially relevant in the political domain, where children's marginalization as incompetent observers of the social and political world is widely understood to be a non-issue. I anticipate a possible critique of my work along a similar vein: children, and by extension their fictions and fairytales, ought not to be considered relevant to political thought because children are unreliable epistemic authorities, even of their own experiences and perceptions. Miranda Fricker, in her book *Epistemic Injustice*, characterizes this kind of claim as a testimonial injustice, which is a "prejudice on the hearer's part [which] causes him to give the speaker less credibility than he would otherwise have given."[134] It is a kind of childism that is, at best, unproductive, and, at worst, regressive. While a thorough look at the ongoing discussion about epistemic authority and children is beyond the scope of this investigation, it is nevertheless an important tension to mention here, since it is important to understanding how the deficiency model of childhood is reified, even in contemporary critical studies.

There is a very sensible critique that can be leveled against *Pooh* that it, like any other children's book or media piece, is ultimately a product of the culture industry. As Horkheimer

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[132] Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or, the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, 138.

[133] Michael D. Baumtrog, "Navigating a Necessary Inequality: Children and Knowledge-Based Injustice," *Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research* 29 (2018), 305, https://alternateroutes.ca/index.php/ar/article/view/22459.

[134] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

and Adorno saw it, the culture industry functions to conceal the "coercive nature of society alienated from itself."[135] It is ubiquitous and unavoidable, egged on by the robust market for entertainment and consumers' identification with the 'needs' it manufactures. The individual consumer is not the subject of the culture industry, rather they are objects "of calculation [...] an appendage of the machinery."[136] Its tools mirror and reproduce the bourgeois social order instead of challenging it, perpetuating regressive and anti-emancipatory values. Many literary criticisms have been leveled against *Pooh* at this level. Louise Ashton, among other feminist scholars, argues that Milne depicts several gender stereotypes. Kanga, the only female character of the text, has a solely maternal function in the narrative. She does not engage in conflict-resolution or problem solving like the other male characters do—she merely identifies problems and waits for their resolution as a passive spectator. Ashton raises the relevant question: "If Kanga, the only female that is present within arguably, the most well known children's text of the twentieth century, embodies the ideologies of 'femininity', then is Children's Literature not partly responsible for the difficulties that surround resignification?"[137] Others argue that the *Pooh* texts are full of colonial and imperialist metaphors, exposing the political conscious and unconscious of British empire-building.[138] Another popular criticism has to do with the domesticity and "middle-classness" of the *Pooh* stories: "It is no doubt obvious that the Pooh stories largely uphold the class structure of England of the time."[139] This criticism has to do with the fact that

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[135] Theodor W Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (1944; repr., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 102.

[136] Theodor W. Adorno and Anson G. Rabinbach, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," *New German Critique* 6, no. 6 (1975), 12, https://doi.org/10.2307/487650.

[137] Louise Ashton, "The Female Subordinate: Restoring Patriarchal Order in the World of Pooh," *International Journal of Innovative Studies in Sociology and Humanities (IJISSH)*, no. 1 (2017), 19, https://ijissh.org/storage/Volume2/Issue1/IJISSH-020102.pdf.

[138] M. Daphne Kutzer, *Empire's Children* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[139] Claudia Mills, *Ethics and Children's Literature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 98.

there is no class mobility in the Hundred-Acre-Wood, as well as the perception of Christopher Robin as a 'snobbish' child of the ruling elite.[140]

Winnie-the-Pooh and *The House at Pooh Corner* undoubtedly contain within them regressive grains of the society from which they emerged. Horkheimer and Adorno would argue that this is true of most, if not all, cultural objects. The point in highlighting this point as an inevitability in cultural objects is not to 'let them off the hook' for holding back emancipatory thought, rather it is to highlight the necessity of identifying potentially oppressive narratives that might lie beneath the surface of any powerful cultural object, even (perhaps especially) those we hold closest to our hearts.

Conclusion

In the last paragraph of *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch says that utopian longing is centrally about finding our way back to the *Heimat*, or the homeland: "The root of history is the working, creating human being who reshapes and overhauls the given facts. Once he has grasped himself and established what is his, without expropriation and alienation, in a real democracy, there arises in the world something which shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been: homeland."[141] For Bloch, the homeland is the utopian ideal to which all of humanity strives. It is the vision of a better world that has not yet been realized but exists, concealed in a latent form, within the present. My analysis has sought to engage the works of *Pooh* with the Blochian utopian framework in this spirit. The child, I contend, is no less a "working, creating human being who reshapes and overhauls the given facts" than any adult. As competent and capable interpreters of their social and political worlds, children, and by extension

[140] Roger Sale, "Child Reading and Man Reading: Oz, Babar, and Pooh," *Children's Literature* 1, no. 1 (1972), 168, https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.0.0607.

[141] Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 1376.

their fictions and fairytales, ought not to be excluded from the 'serious' tradition of utopian literature. Their exclusion from the tradition, which is ultimately concerned about social progress, conceals a more radical emancipatory vision of children as co-creators of social and political worlds.

In service of this end, I first argued that the marginalization of children in the history of political thought has tended to revolve around the baseline belief in children's lack of capacity, flexibly defined, to participate in democratic life. I traced the deficiency view of childhood through key moments in the history of political thought, engaging with Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Then, I defended that, because of the primacy of children's intimate experiences with works of children's literature, the exercise of reading children's literature as political theory can help problematize the traditional deficiency view of childhood. A successful piece of children's literature must, at least to a certain extent, resonate with children and their experiences. Thus, it must reflect some minimum presumption of children's capacities and abilities. In Part II, I laid the theoretical foundation for the case study to come, examining Bloch's theory of utopia and its connection to childhood and the child subject. The Blochian child, much like the Romantic child, is understood as a privileged 'seer' of critical truths and utopian longings. Their knowledge is held in high esteem, and the *time* of childhood is considered, in itself, utopian. Nevertheless, the child in Bloch is a passive and completely generalizable figure; they are emblematic of the Becoming, and not considered for their own sake. In Parts III and IV, I undertook a case study to demonstrate the merits of reading children's literature as political theory. First, I defended that *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner* should be considered works of *utopian* fiction, using Hintz and Ostrey's criterion for evaluating the potentially utopian contents of children's literature and Levitas' notions of form,

function, and content. I suggested that the Hundred-Acre-Wood is a self-conscious, collectively organized society that is 'enclosed' in both a spatial and temporal sense. Then, I argued that works of children's fiction are uniquely positioned as a kind of 'first' utopia. The Hundred-Acre-Wood does not need to sketch out a plausible alternative world for it to constitute a utopia for children. It is enough that Milne's utopia provides a sense of time and place devoid of material need, where the child protagonist is able to explore their sense of agency and capacity to transform their social and political worlds. I also argued that works of children's literature could be considered concretely utopian insofar as they perform pedagogical and political functions. Works of children's fiction are much more than purely abstract utopias: they are sites of a transformative meditative exercise that can inspire visions of better worlds for children and adults alike. Finally, I defend that the creatures in Milne's *Pooh* works 'act politically' by exemplifying the four ideals of child participation defined by the Lundy Model: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence.

Ultimately, this analysis has sought to recover the figure of the child from the periphery of political thought by arguing for the reading of children's literature as political theory. While the education and moral upbringing of children have long been understood as central to the long-term functioning of democratic societies, it is critical that the children of political thought are treated as *more* than symbols of futures to come. As I have stated here, children are complex and dynamic people who deserve to be understood as competent observers and agents of their social and political worlds. Recognizing this emancipatory claim begins by problematizing the baseline presumption of children's inherent incapacities, reconceptualizing the child as an equal and agential political subject, and taking seriously the fictions, fairytales, and Real-Possibles to which children are intimately connected.

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