RETURNING TO CHILDHOOD: MEMOIRS OF CHILDHOOD READING

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes Francis Spufford's *The Child that Books Built: A Life in Reading,* Jane Sullivan's *Storytime: Growing up with Books,* and Margaret Mackey's *One Child Reading: My Auto-Bibliography* to investigate how memoirists recall events and reread stories from childhood. I argue that memoirs of childhood reading or bibliomemoirs temporarily fuse childhood and adulthood through the act of rereading, which produces emotional responses, and writing a memoir. By rereading childhood stories, memoirists identify with their child self and express feelings comparable to those they felt upon first reading. In bibliomemoirs, passive and active reading create what I describe as a child and an adult voice upon rereading. The imaginative and transformative properties of books make it easier for memoirists to journey back to their childhood. Returning to physical and imaginative places in childhood is also a critical part of memory retrieval and rereading. As "embodied readers," with cognitive and physical reactions to reading, our "sites of literacy," the places where we read, help memoirists of childhood reading establish unique senses of self (Mackey 56). Inspired by William Blake's notion of the fluidity of childhood and adulthood and by recent literary urges to reconsider categorizations for children and adult literature, this project explores the way memoirs of childhood reading can cross boundaries of age and time.

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Introduction

The dim lamp light cast shadows on the red and green room, the clock on the mantle, the ball of yarn. When I kissed my parents good night, and jumped up on my top bunk bed, I entered the silent room of *Goodnight Moon.* Something about those hardcover picture books kept drawing me in, even after my literacy skills surpassed the need for pictures. Looking back now, I think it was the colors, the attention to detail, the familiarity of objects in an unusual setting, and the secrecy of being awake past bedtime. While my history of literacy in childhood may look like yours, when I think back to my wooden, pink door sign with my sisters' names in cursive, the smell of my mother's "Romance" perfume, and the feeling of my grandmother's maroon, knitted blankets, my history of childhood becomes more distinct. What we, as readers of memoirs share, is the universal experience of childhood, stitched together with different sights, smells, and textures. These details differentiate every autobiography and memoir about childhood and making them worth reading. As Roberta Seelinger Trites puts it, in her foreword to Margaret Mackey's memoir, *One Child Reading: My Auto-Bibliography,* "every individual's literacy has emerged from elements that are almost universal and entirely unique to that individual" (Mackey VIII). This balance of uniqueness and similarity allows readers like myself to critically engage with bibliomemoirs, while also remaining self-aware.

Although I try to remain objective, memories of my own childhood have resurfaced while reading memoirs of childhood reading. I note four reasons why I am reminded of my own childhood and I describe them below, as they relate to my project as a whole. 1. Memoirs, like Mackey's, urge readers to "bring their own private and internal sense of what it means to maintain focus on an act of reading" when viewing or reading personal material. In order to understand what is happening in a photograph of Mackey, "aged about six, stirring the porridge

pot for breakfast and reading," she asks that readers reflect on moments when we too "got lost" in a good book (Mackey 3-4). 2. As readers of any genre, including non-fiction like memoirs, our Theory of Mind, which is "the ability to ascribe mental states to others (and also to oneself) in order to explain and predict behavior," encourages us to acknowledge a character's mental states, such as their feelings (Samson 1). As I read bibliomemoirs, I not only reflect on my own childhood, but use my arsenal of experience to empathize with the narrators.

3. While I limit personal reflection, I offer a brief childhood memory to stress the significance of the "I" in autobiography. The "I" of the memoir, usually the narrator/author, denotes a complex self. Smith and Watson extend the significance of this "self-referential marker" beyond a past or present self, to consider "the historical 'I,' the narrating 'I,' the narrated 'I,' [and] the ideological 'I'" (Smith and Watson 72). This approach to narration considers a unified, yet distinguishable, view of childhood and adulthood, as the narrated child "I" is only conjured when recalled through the memory of the adult. In my final chapter on voice, I locate moments when the narrator's "I" refers to their child and their adult self. My analysis of voice is supported by Smith and Watson's description of the narrating "I" as "composed of multiple voices, a heteroglossia attached to multiple and mobile subject positions, because the narrating 'I' is neither unified nor stable" (Smith and Watson 74). I discuss all four "Is," with a particular interest in the "narrated 'I'" and the "ideological 'I,'" which acknowledges the people, places, and culture that shape the self. As a reader of memoirs, I am interested in moments when the narrator "calls attention to the act of narrating itself," such as in descriptions of what can and cannot be remembered. While treating memoirs as polyvocal helps discuss the child, it also opens doors to consider the extent of our own reading voice on the written voice. I argue that since readers intentionally or unintentionally compare our "I" to the memoir's "I," it is

important to consider what biases and understandings we carry, which lie heavily on another's personal history. 4. Lastly, I stress that memoir writing, in combination with reading, often incites memory, much like a particular smell or taste, and can affirm or solidify a foggy memory. Now, I turn to the memoirs that have sparked my personal reflection and are the objects of my analyses.

My project investigates how memoirs of childhood reading recall events of childhood, phenomenologically and cognitively, and how memoirists reread stories from childhood. I argue that memoirs of childhood reading temporarily fuse childhood and adulthood through the act of rereading, which produces emotional responses, and writing a memoir. By their nature, memoirs require writers to recall past events and by doing so, create a history of the self. Memoirs rely on both cognitive and phenomenal recollections of events, which are often located in childhood. Cognitive memories are propositional, meaning they refer to events, while phenomenological memories are those that involve remembered sensations and feelings of those events. By rereading childhood stories, memoirists identify with their child self and express feelings comparable to those they felt upon first reading these stories. Memoirs of childhood reading also balance between passive or "entranced reading," a term used by Hugh Crago, and critical or active reading. In bibliomemoirs, these two kinds of reading often create what I describe as a child and an adult voice upon rereading. Jane Sullivan writes, "How can a twenty-first-century woman in her sixties identify with a nineteenth-century girl of seven? Easy. That voice gets me there" (Sullivan 19). For Sullivan, it is Lewis Carroll's narration in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that allows her to not only identify with Alice, but also with her younger self. The imaginative and transformative properties of books make it easier for memoirists to journey back to their childhood. Returning to physical and imaginative places in childhood is also a critical

part of memory retrieval and rereading. As "embodied readers," with cognitive and physical reactions to reading, our "sites of literacy," the places where we read, help memoirists of childhood reading establish unique senses of self (Mackey 56). Inspired by William Blake's notion of the fluidity of childhood and adulthood, as seen in his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience,* and by recent literary urges to reconsider categorizations for children and adult literature, this project explores the way memoirs of childhood reading can cross boundaries of age and time.

Methodology and Theory

I apply close-reading, reader-response theory, and autobiographical theory to three memoirs of childhood reading: Jane Sullivan's *Storytime: Growing up with Books* (2019), Margaret Mackey's *One Child Reading: My Auto-Bibliography* (2016), and Francis Spufford's *The Child that Books Built: A Life in Reading* (2002). I consider the kinds of language used to denote memory, such as "looking back," and the significance of formal features, such as chapter titles, for organizing remembrances. I engage with reader-response theory in my analyses of memoirists' reactions to rereading. Initiated by critics like Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish in the 1960s and 70s, reader-response theory rejects New Criticism, which analyzes formal elements of literature, excluding biography or readership. Reader-response theory considers the reader just as integral as the author for bringing meaning to a text and for building worlds from words on a page. Hugh Crago's *Entranced by Story: Brain, Tale and Teller, from Infancy to Old Age* defines this theory as "a way of approaching poetry, drama, and narrative fiction that… took the *experience* of literature seriously, instead of sidelining it. We are not passive 'consumers' of story….but create our own *experience* of stories" (Crago 5). Memoirs of childhood reading

operate on reader-response and I analyze how Spufford, Mackey, and Sullivan emotionally and physically respond to their childhood stories.

This project is also informed by Narrative theory or "narratology," which analyzes the "components of narrative and...how particular narratives achieve their effects" (Culler 84). Narrative theory seems particularly relevant to childhood studies, as Jonathan Culler explains how and why story-telling stems from a folkloric tradition. Spufford, Mackey, and Sullivan adopt and transform ingrained literary expectations and rules of stories, like rhythm, structure, and plot sequence to their narratives. I analyze the narrative effects of reread childhood stories as well as of the memoirs themselves. Under the guidance of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* I define these memoirs and differentiate child and adult voices. Although memoirs rely on the uncertainty of memory, I suspend "questions about the ultimate reality or knowability of the world and describe the world as it is given to consciousness," as a tenant of phenomenological theory, so that I may focus on the perceptions of readers without debating their legitimacy (Culler 137).

I reflect on the significance of reading in childhood and rereading in adulthood with terminology from Margaret Mackey, Hugh Crago, Maria Tatar and Jerome Bruner who describe what happens when we read. Informed by Childhood and Youth Studies, which welcomes interdisciplinary approaches to studying diverse experiences of childhood, but often fails to consider literary studies, I stress the importance of studying first person narratives of childhood. While the trajectory of this field often prioritizes accounts by children, my project will consider accounts by adults about their own childhoods. I argue that a "return" to childhood is as significant as accounts given during childhood. I hope to identify a blur between these stages of life through authors' retellings and through rereadings of books. Mackey quotes Valerie Krips

who states, "'Our memory- which includes memories of childhood- runs like a thread through our thinking and experiencing. In this sense, we are never free of our past. We are, however, fully capable of reimagining and renarrativizing it'" (Mackey 5). I argue that we are not only never free of our past, but that we can return to the past through memory and reading. Bibliomemoirs blur the child-adult binary, which Perry Nodelman argues for when we discuss Children's Literature.

My focus on memoirs of childhood reading is also an understudied area within Children's Literature scholarship as described in Chapter 1. The primary sources that I have selected, and the few that exist, are all written in the 21st century. I analyze memoirs about childhood reading, and not other memoirs with tangents on reading, in order to narrow my primary sources and to consider the effect of writing specifically about reading. Lastly, while my project will mainly be of interest to Children's Literature and life writing academics, I welcome readers with a basic interest in childhood stories and literacy.

I should note some limitations to my study. I have selected memoirs of childhood reading that have been cited by other scholars and which have been published in the 21st century. That certainly excludes some wonderful memoirs and it also limits the diversity of my project; Goodreads.com lists 109 most liked bibliomemoirs on a scale of 1-5 (https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/89993.Bibliomemoirs). While I do not adopt Goodreads.com's data, as books have only been rated by 18 voters, this extensive list shows how many bibliomemoirs have been published, with the oldest on the list from 1996. Despite the abundance of bibliomemoirs, only a handful specifically focus on childhood, memories of childhood reading, and revisiting childhood stories. Memoirs like *Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader* by Anne Fadiman (1998) and *Tolstoy and the Purple Chair: My Year of*

Magical Reading by Nina Sankovitch (2011) are top ranked on this list, but do not focus on childhood reading. Instead, Fadiman heavily reflects on her relationship with her husband and their shared library and Sankovitch recounts her year of reading after her sister's death as an adult and how reading became therapeutic. I limit this project to three primary sources so that I may adequately address them all and choose stories with a singular interest in childhood and its effect on adulthood. Goodreads.com's list also does not include Mackey and Sullivan's work, since they are fairly new and most likely less read.

Although my sample is limited in diversity, Spufford, Sullivan, and Mackey's western upbringings illuminate similarities in education curricula, literary interests, and stigmas around reading. All three authors are white, with two from England and Mackey from Canada, but recall unique events and places that shaped their childhoods. For example, in Chapter 4, I describe how all three authors were avid readers as children, but were advised against reading too much. All three authors were also writers as children, and can remember learning to write, which according to Deborah Brandt's study is uncommon. By conducting "self-studies" these memoirists reveal the particularities of their childhoods which make them unique, such as the impact of Spufford's disabled sister on his desire to escape through reading in childhood. There are also limitations to memoir writing as well, but discuss those in my first chapter.

Structure

Highlighting memories of reading and writing in the text as they relate to age and place, I compare my samples by structure, aim, method, and theme. I begin by defining the bibliomemoir as a subgenre as it relates to Spufford, Mackey, and Sullivan's memoirs. Since memories of childhood are shaped by cultural notions and all three authors are part of the "baby boomer"

generation, I explore the effect of post WWII British culture on memory and on the second Golden Period of Children's Literature in Chapter 2. As embodied readers, Spufford, Mackey, and Sullivan's literacy was shaped by both time and place. Chapter 3 identifies key sites that shape these narratives, such as the forest for Spufford, and which codify childhood memories. In addition to being avid readers, informed by their geographic locations, these memoirists reflect on learning to write as children; memoir writing in adulthood becomes a key tool for memory retrieval. While writing and rereading does recall childhood memories, natural limitations to autobiographical memory is fleshed out through Charles Fernyhough in Chapter 5. What cannot be remembered, called the "murk" to Mackey, is just as insightful as vivid memories and I pay close attention to way memories are often retold like stories. Rereading shapes these narratives and is distinctive to bibliomemoirs, which engage with passive and active rereading. While passive reading is often associated with children, and active reading with adults, Chapter 6 traces the different kinds of readers Spufford, Mackey, and Sullivan became with age. Lastly, Chapter 7 offers examples of child and adult voices in these bibliomemoirs, that are particularly prompted by rereading illustrated literature.

Returning to Childhood: The Case for Reading and Writing

Probably the most direct path we can travel to a remote childhood is through autobiography, in spite of the fact that it is written by adults (MacLeod 75).

From a baby's babble to a child's daydreaming, literary scholars posit that storytelling and writing are as natural as rain fall. The case for considering writing and reading as a way to return to childhood is rooted in neuroscience studies to psychoanalytic theory. Noam Chomsky and Umberto Eco, to roughly compile their complex theories, consider language innate to the

body. Spufford refers to this equalizer among humans as "the same native tongue" (Spufford 66). He writes, the ability to think in words "is the layer of the mind that Chomskyans believe is our fundamental organ of linguistic ability, generated by the physical structure of our bodies (Spufford 66). If we have an innate capacity for language and speech, then writing is an extension of that capacity. Mackey quotes Eco who states, "We can think of writing as an extension of the hand, and therefore as almost biological. It is the communication tool most closely linked to the body" (Mackey 76). As I discuss in Chapter 4, since reading and writing are bodily processes, meaning we react cognitively and physically when performing or responding to both activities, Mackey stresses the importance of considering readers as embodied. Embodied literacy recognizes the social and physical influence of learning to read and thereby helps explain how we move and think while reading. What Mackey, Spufford, and Sullivan's memoirs show are indeed embodied responses to Children's Literature, in the form of emotional responses, which stimulate memories of the past. These emotional responses are often mirrored reflections of our "first" reading experiences, such as a book generating fear as an adult and child. How and what we write as children and adults is shaped by what we read, especially by our favorite authors who in schools are often "mentors" for our own writing styles (Dutro and McIver 93).

Characteristics of literature that allow us to fall into another world, to use a literary expression that acknowledges embodiment, are also linked to innate functions of the human brain. As Spufford, Mackey, and Sullivan explore through rereading, becoming "entranced by story," utilizes the right hemisphere of the brain, which develops first as children. While storytelling and reading involve the left hemisphere's language making ability, it is the right hemisphere or the "old brain," that creates "*analogies* to experiences- instead of talking about joy, it *tells us a story that evokes joy*" (Crago 13). Our ability to "experience" a story often

requires that we put active reading aside and lose the "critic's" voice in favor of going on the story's ride. I argue that allowing oneself to become entranced by story often produces a child's voice in memoirs, which focuses less on how or why the story works, but rather on the emotional and physical responses we have to stories. Most children, especially before school age, read passively or for pleasure, without an eye for rhetorical devices and when adults read this way, they are reminded of a process associated with childhood.

In addition to the neuroscience perspective, stories often draw from life experiences in childhood, which as an adult often incite a flood of personal childhood memories. Psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud interpret literature's "power" as it "speaks to fantasies and feelings that are deeply rooted in all of us from childhood" or as Crago states, "*stories 'work' because they simulate the experience we all had in infancy"* (Crago 13). Fernyhough's study on autobiographical memory, supports the notion that reading can spark childhood memories. Of course our memories of childhood are not only the product of neurological effects, or else we would all share similar memories. Historically significant events and smaller scale cultural and familial experiences personalize each childhood memory. As postwar childhood narratives, these memoirs reveal similarities among popular authors for children, that reflected new notions of childhood, and make a case for reading memoirs as historical documents. These memoirs also emphasize particular life events, such as Sullivan reading her father's comics, which contribute to unique memories of childhood. As we will see, bibliomemoirs rely on books to make sense of historical events and to imagine childhood.

Chapter 1: Memoirs of Childhood Reading or Bibliomemoirs

Joyce Carol Oates provides the first, and seemingly, only definition for memoirs of

childhood reading in her review of Rebecca Mead's *My Life in Middlemarch* (2014). Oates defines the bibliomemoir as "a subspecies of literature combining criticism and biography with the intimate, confessional tone of autobiography" (Oates 1). Bibliomemoirs are a relatively new subgenre which grew in popularity during the late 1990s. They fall under the larger classification of life writing, which includes autobiographies, diaries, memoirs, biographies, etc. Memoir today is described as "a first-hand biographical account, replete with observations and expressions of emotion, of an aspect or the whole of a life, written largely from personal knowledge or experiences" (Goode 19). The confessional tone that Oates refers to stems from the use of the first person in many memoirs, as is the case in Spufford, Sullivan, and Mackey's, and distinguishes autobiography and memoir from other kinds of life writing. While bibliomemoirs often depict the self, as a child and adult, they also incorporate scholarly voices in order to include biographic information about authors and add to our understanding of literacy. Oates believes that this layer of "criticism" makes this subgenre unique, yet this kind of memoir is understudied. Although Lucy Scholes writes that "gone too is the sense that the bibliomemoir is in any way under-represented," this is untrue for literary criticism (Scholes 9). There is little to no scholarship on Mackey, Spufford, and Sullivan's memoirs, beyond literature reviews, which only support arguments for popularity and reader reception. So, my close readings will be informed by conventions of memoirs and my own interpretations. It is now worth noting how bibliomemoirs compare to the larger memoir genre.

While memoirs and autobiography are often used synonymously, Erich Goode cites Gore Vidal who states that "memoir 'is how one remembers one's own life, while an autobiography is history, requiring research'" (Goode 19). This only partially applies to my samples since they do focus on memories of childhood, but through historical accounts of their settings and of physical

books. Another definition of memoir offered by Smith and Watson, which holds true for bibliomemoirs, is that they focus on "one moment or period of experience rather than an entire life span and offered reflections on its significance for the writer's previous status and self-understanding" (Smith and Watson 4). Unlike autobiographies, which are typically more concerned with portraying the author's life span based upon documented evidence, Mackey, Spufford, and Sullivan's memoirs end at literacy in adolescence.

In terms of authorship, memoirs have been credited for being the "every man's" form, unlike autobiographies which are typically reserved for famous individuals; this contrasts from historic uses of memoirs for the elite to "chronicle their accomplishments" (Smith and Watson 3). Goode argues that memoir need not be written by the famous, but rather if done well, "a well-written memoir may *render* its writer noteworthy and accomplished" (Goode 21). Women have notably dominated the memoir field, with best-selling memoirs spiking in the mid to late 1990s, during a "memoir craze" (Douglas 24). Two of my primary sources are by women, and their memoirs offer a breadth of material on gender norms that shaped and were shaped by the literature they read. As seen in Chapter 3, Mackey and Sullivan share a literary interest in the home, which may extend from their gendered upbringings. I am particularly interested in acknowledging definitions for autobiography and memoir, because of Mackey, Spufford, and Sullivan's definitions of their own works.

So, how would I describe the bibliomemoir? I would define it as a subgenre of memoirs of childhood, focused specifically on one or more stories read during childhood and reread in adulthood, which identify a thread between childhood and adulthood. These memoirs refer to the physical properties of books and literary criticism to affirm their memories and feelings about a childhood past. As this project aims to prove, I believe that the act of rereading, which is

particular to this genre, can allow authors to reexperience childhood. My definitions of the genre have developed from my primary texts and I investigate how Mackey, Spufford, and Sullivan define and structure their works.

In the Memoirist's Own Words: Identity and Genre

Mackey, Spufford, and Sullivan's childhood reading habits carried through adulthood and influenced their decision to write bibliomemoirs. Sullivan's text, *Storytime: Growing up with Books,* does not declare itself a memoir, but does comprise of childhood memories. She begins with the source of her reading addiction, her "frantic appetite" for reading in childhood, emphasizing its effect on her life now (Sullivan 6). Unlike Sullivan, Spufford labels his work an "inward autobiography," but does share the same "frantic appetite" for reading (Spufford 21, 10). Both writers describe their reading with "Gastronomical metaphors [which]… remind us that great stories can combine the delights of consumption with the satisfactions of nourishment" (Tatar 23). As Maria Tatar explains in *Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood,* memoirists often refer to their habits as addictions to emphasize needs in childhood that could only be fulfilled by reading. As we will see, Sullivan's need for friendship and Spufford's need for escape from his disabled sister led them to adventure and hero stories. Since there are no support groups or cures for their habits, in the traditional sense, these authors turn to memoir writing. As with most addictions, repetitive behavior and an ability to feel an altered state is what sustains the addiction. For compulsive readers, this addiction started in childhood when they were first given the "taste" of time travel, exploration, alternate reality, and fantasy, experiences that could not be satisfied in their ordinary lives. Childhood was the place and time where these authors became dependent on reading. Childhood is also a critical time for identity formation and physical development. Spufford, Sullivan, and Mackey's reading "addictions," not only

influenced their habits in adulthood, but have also shaped the individuals they have become. Sullivan writes, “I have read compulsively all my life, and it’s not an exaggeration to say that reading has made me what I am” (Sullivan 7). Reading is not just a daily habit for some, but a central part of an identity, and the habits established in childhood can be long-lasting.

Spufford frames his first chapter around this addiction, which he calls “a frantic appetite” in his chapter titled, “Confessions of an English Fiction Eater” alluding to Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (Spufford 10). By comparing Spufford’s story to De Quincey’s, he admits that his memoir is a confession of his reading habits and that he still does not know what specifically led to his “addiction.” Less explicitly, however, by drawing on De Quincey’s text, Spufford suggests that while his memoir intends to show the effects of childhood reading on the adult, what this inevitably entails is an exploration of the reader, Spufford, now and then. Spufford makes his implicit vs. explicit aim apparent when he states that through rereading he will try to become the “reader” he had been and not the child, attempting to distance himself from his shameful pre-adolescent self (Spufford 21). De Quincey makes these implicit claims in his preface, while explicitly committing to expose opium’s effects. Tatar states, “The euphoric side to the belief that books nourish you in childhood and reinvigorate your senses is shadowed by an almost equally prominent view of childhood reading as a disorder- an addiction, compulsion, obsession, or affliction” (Tatar 25). While reading is promoted in most homes and schools today, as we will see in Deborah Brandt’s study, Sullivan recalls that “In the 1950s and ‘60s, excessive reading for pleasure was regarded with the same suspicion that later attended excessive television watching or video game playing...the habit was seen as mere escapism” (Sullivan 6). Mackey was also encouraged by her mother to play outside with other children, even though she preferred to read indoors (Mackey 59). Despite negative connotations around

reading, as bookworms, all three memoirists are compelled to explore the power of reading on their identities.

Mackey's text, *One Child Reading: My Auto-Bibliography,* diverges from both Spufford and Sullivan's titles in that she names her respective genre. While I have discovered two names for this kind of memoir, bibliomemoir and the less eloquent, memoirs of childhood reading, Mackey creates her own name, which she calls an auto-bibliography. Mackey's title closely connects to the aims expressed in her work, in which she states

> I refer to this project as an auto-bibliography rather than an autobiography, and I have designed it as a study of materials rather than simply a personal history. Telling a purely private narrative is not the driving impetus of this work; instead, I am interested in creating a complex understanding of the three-way relationship between a particular life *and* named, specific texts *and* the theories that help us understand how reading works (Mackey 17).

Mackey's definition of her text also helps define the genre, which (non-exclusively) engages with three processes, being an analysis of personal history with specific texts through theory. Mackey less explicitly explores her reactions to reading in order to turn attention toward physical books, rather than toward her memory. Many memoirs of this kind intend to go back and read childhood stories and document any changes or realizations. Also interestingly, Mackey's index does not reference the word "memoir," "autobiography," or 'life writing," perhaps because of her adoption of the new term. Titles like Mackey's influenced my selection process as I searched for memoirs exclusively about childhood reading and her title's directness made its way to the top of my list.

A comprehensive personal history is not necessarily what is revealed in these autobiographical works. Rather, the memoirs focus heavily on aspects of adult life that closely relate to the stories reread. For example, without reading the biographical blurb on the back cover of Spufford's *The Child that Books Built,* I would not have known that he is a journalist

and the author of *I May Be Some Time,* which received awards in 1997. I would have gathered that he lives in London and grew up in England, as setting is vital to this work. It may be argued that all parts of a published book, including the acknowledgments page, the cover art, and the dust jacket should be taken into consideration when analyzing the body of a text. However, these aspects of publication more frequently reflect the "hands" of the publishing industry rather than the interests of the author. It seems ironic that a memoir, even of this kind, would include a separate "about the author" page, but it does reveal readers' desires for complete overviews of authors' lives, or at least of their occupational titles. While Spufford's cover choice, which illustrates the shadow of a child reading beneath the sheets of his bed, urges readers to consider when and where children read, it does not necessarily reflect Spufford's story, in which reading occurred in all places of his home. Spufford provides information about his adult life only in relation to its significance to setting. For example, he reflects on "getting lost" in public spaces as an adult and child, which he identifies as the moment when "the phase of placatory self-consciousness is past" browsing the libraries' shelves until drool came out of his mouth (Spufford 7). Another gleam into his adult life, can be identified in "Chapter Four: The Town," in which Spufford drives through De Smet, South Dakota on a journalism project to uncover the reality of Laura Ingalls Wilder's setting for the *Little House on the Prairie* series. Other than these indications of Spufford's adult life, he focuses less generally on his present life, as an autobiography would do, and more on how the past shapes his present through close analysis of his reading materials.

Sullivan's memoir functions similarly to Spufford's in that she does not spend time writing about her occupation, but rather on the way being a mother has transformed her readings of childhood stories. For example, she writes, "I am still Alice when I read her adventures, but I

am also a mother, old enough to be her grandmother, with a fierce desire to protect her from something I am not quite sure I understand or believe in" (Sullivan 36). Rereading Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* Sullivan remarks that reading allows her to identify with Alice, but also feel a competing and confusing desire to protect the fictional child as a mother. Although Sullivan has a son of her own, she can still imagine and associate with the child. As I will explore, the imaginative properties of reading in addition to the act of rereading, allow memoirists like Sullivan to identify with their child self and even child characters.

Like Sullivan and Spufford, Mackey focuses on childhood through close analyses of reading materials like "picture books and chapter books, school textbooks, church and Sunday-school materials, gramophone recordings of music and audiobooks, radio and television programs," etc. (Mackey 7). Mackey's extensive study, which consists of 509 pages, more than Spufford's 213 and Sullivan's 338-page narratives, is conscious of the impact of diverse media on literacy and formations of childhood memory. While literature read in school or at bedtime is often credited for childhood literacy, materials like traffic signs and cereal box ingredients also have an undeniable and often forgotten impression on the early reader. Mackey is direct about what is excluded in her study such as the "remembering adult" (Mackey 7). She writes, "What will remain invisible in this tale, unless I make a point of foregrounding it, is the importance of my place now, as the remembering adult" (Mackey 7). However, she does briefly provide that she is a sister, a daughter, "a wife of long standing, a mother of two, a grandmother of three, and a professor of Library and Information Sciences at the University of Alberta" (Mackey 8). Since family has been an integral part of Mackey's literacy, it is appropriate to suggest how her reading practices today are still impacted by family. Chapter 7 on adult vs. child voices complicates Mackey's aims, as she weaves childlike narratives through her theory in an effort to define the

child she was. While I remark about different definitions for memoirs vs. memoirs of childhood reading, it is the act of writing a memoir as well as rereading stories that differentiates the remembering experience.

Chapter 2: Post-War British Childhood and Cultural Memory

Life wells up and alters and adds. Even things in a book-case change if they are alive; we find ourselves wanting to meet them again; we find them altered (Woolf 217-18).

Children's responses to reading, as well as our own memories, are difficult to capture in writing due to cultural memory, shifts in place and time, and the cognitive process of storing and retrieving memory. Interviewing a child would not necessarily get us any closer to the experience of childhood reading, due to limitations with interviews. It is even difficult for adults to communicate why they enjoy reading, beyond expressing their feelings. Maria Nikolajeva writes, "Not even all adults are capable of verbalizing their appreciation of literature or art in full, instead of offering subjective emotional responses ('Liked'/'Didn't like)" (Nikolajeva 146). Studies with children have the same complications with the addition of language limitations. Therefore, as Tatar explains, studies like my own end up "relying on former children, or what Theodor Geisel called 'obsolete children.' Memory may be fallible, but adult recollections of childhood reading experiences proved a rich source for examining the transformative power of words and stories" (Tatar 10). While I do not investigate the process of reading, as Maria Nikolajeva does in "Literacy, Competence and Meaning-Making: A Human Sciences Approach" or even the features of stories that transform us as Tatar does, those "subjective emotional response[s]" that Nikolajeva refers to are telling of how we react as children and why certain memories stick.

As socialized beings, humans are influenced, learn, and identify with the things we absorb around us whether that be media, physical environments, culture, or people. When individuals of a group or region have shared experiences and are socialized by similar things, they retain familiar memories. In reference to childhood and childhood reading, this may be considered cultural memory. Kate Douglas writes, "cultural memory becomes a useful concept here, for considering how autobiographies of childhood function as acts of memory. Cultural memory reflects the ways in which people collectively remember the past and imagine the future" (Douglas 23). Cultural memory may help explain why periods like the late nineteenth century are known as the "Golden Age of Childhood" as well as why Spufford refers to his own childhood as a golden age.

Valerie Krips' *The Presence of the Past: Memory, Heritage and Childhood in Post-War Britain* provides a historical account of the kinds of shifts that occurred in England, from 1945 onward and which necessarily influenced literature for children, the time when Spufford, Sullivan, and Mackey were children. Born in England, Sullivan and Spufford automatically share certain memories of childhood. Mackey too shares cultural sentiments from childhood due to Canada's relationship to England. The cultural differences among these authors are addressed in Chapter 3 on place. Krips argues that after WWII, England showed a particular interest in "heritage" or as Patrick Wright describes it, "'What it is to be English'" (Krips 2). She cites Patrick Wright's *On Living in an Old Country* which "notes that the twentieth century was particularly marked by a dislocation of memory, and of traditional social integrative patterns" which "affect everyday historical consciousness and disrupt habit" (Krips 2). These changes in "social integrative patterns" and "habit" resulted from events like the second World War, after which England did not need physical restoration, England's failure to invade the Suez Canal in

Egypt, dispersals of land, and destruction of country homes as people moved to cities. A rise in "the so-called 'affluent society'" during the 1950s, which allowed citizens more spending power, "home ownership and foreign holidays," was propelled by a rise in physical and social mobility through cars (Krips 4). With these social changes, came efforts by the government to preserve the past, including some of these unwanted country homes which were turned into public historic sites in the hopes of creating an English history. This conscious effort to preserve history may be why Spufford, Sullivan, and Mackey participated in life writing from their childhoods to today. Krips cites Raphael Samuel's *Theatres of Memory* which states that "the expansion of historical culture in the period….produced a new inclusiveness that encouraged the claims of keepers of 'unofficial knowledges,' such as the collectors of memorabilia, family historians, local archivists, and so on, to construct history" (Krips 4). This seems to be a good indicator of why Mackey extensively writes about Newfoundland's history, pre and post confederation with Canada, as an attempt on her part to provide history where it was lacking.

Spufford, Sullivan, and Mackey explicitly reference either their year of birth or the years they learned to read in order to historicize and culturally define their childhoods. Spufford, who learned to read at six, writes, "I was born in 1964, so I grew up in a golden age comparable to the present heyday of J.K. Rowling and Philip Pullman" (Spufford 17). The kinds of literature that Sullivan, Mackey, and Spufford read as children belong to the "second golden age of British children's fiction" which "stretches from the late 1950s to the 1980s." (Krips 25). Children's Literature is not only an example of the kind of media that socializes individuals, but it also helps define cultural sentiments of a particular era. Krips refers to Children's Literature as "lieux de mémoire" or "site of memory" as it preserves memory for adults and of cultures (Krips 31).

Spufford acknowledges that what often accompanies "golden" periods of childhood are

transformations of childhood. He writes, "Unifying this lucky concurrence of books [consisting of literature by William Mayne, Peter Dickinson, Alan Garner, and Joan Aiken], and making them seem for a while like contributions to a single intelligible project, was a kind of temporary cultural consensus: a consensus both about what children were and about where we all were in history" (Spufford 18). New developments by doctors like Dr. Benjamin Spock, in the mid 1900s, on parenting discouraged the idea that "a child was clay to be modeled by benevolent adult authority" (Spufford 18). The idea that children are unformed adults waiting to be shaped was promoted in the early nineteenth century especially in literature for children which was didactic in nature. Anne Scott MacLeod writes that the American sentiment beginning in the mid-1800s up until developmental psychology and parenting theories of the 1950s, believed "children were rational and affectionate by nature. Authors advised that quiet meditation was more effective than punishment" (MacLeod 76). The idea that children should be nurtured continued into the latter half of the twentieth century and was one of Dr. Spock's leading principles.

Cultural notions of childhood shape how individuals remember their childhood and further, how they shape their memoirs. Mackey's memoir is highly aware of the effects of her environment on her memories of childhood. She writes, "I believe that learning to read my environment contributed significantly to how I learned to read my books," books tailored for young girls. She further organizes her memoir based on geographic principles, like nodes, paths, regions, and edges, developed from revisiting her hometown of St. John's, Newfoundland (Mackey 41). Like Spufford, her childhood was shaped by the effects of World War II and born in 1948, she "became literate as a child aged one to thirteen, between 1950 and 1962" (Mackey 7). Mackey's childhood in Newfoundland was marked by "the slaughter of the First World War;

the terrible, bleak poverty of the 1930s that crippled Newfoundland….and the acrimonious vote on Confederation [with Canada]" (Mackey 29). While postwar societies are marked by the kind of "step forward" that recovery entails, Mackey and Spufford's childhood also retained a cultural memory of destruction (Spufford 18).

Lastly, Sullivan provides similar understandings of how her childhood in St. John's Wood, London shaped her adulthood. While her narrative is less historical, as she does not disclose her birth date, and is less "theory-driven" than Mackey or Spufford's, she does compare cultural memories of Children's Literature to its perception today. She writes, "I grew up in the era before the great flowering of children's books from the 1970s onwards. I didn't discover Roald Dahl or Maurice Sendak, let alone Dr. Seuss or *Harry Potter*" (Sullivan 9). As part of the "baby boomer generation," Sullivan is aware of the books, mainly "classics," that have necessarily been excluded from her narrative as they were not present in her childhood (Sullivan 9). For example, she remarks on being a "smug teenager," at sixteen years old in the 1960s, writing a borrowed exposé on Lewis Carroll as a pedophile for a class assignment (Sullivan 35). Sullivan is ashamed of her teenage attempt to dismantle Carroll's reputation as well as the reputation of his works. What her recollections reveal is the effect of cultural memory on both childhood and Children's Literature. Since *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was and is still considered one of the greatest historic works for children, not only was Sullivan's teacher disappointed in her assignment, but Sullivan today is disappointed by her carelessness for the story. As Sullivan writes, Carroll or the Reverend Charles Dodgson, could have been too familiar with young girls; however, this aspect of his life remains uncertain and it should not bear upon his creative material. Although Sullivan is not explicit, I believe that her modern view of herself and of the literature is molded by continued reverence for Carroll as an author, thereby leading

her to rethink the praise around canonical literature. While Sullivan does discuss "the classics" she also describes other culturally and temporally significant readings like Enid Blyton's *The Castle of Adventure,* which "most English children of the 1950s and '60s" read (Sullivan 58).

The kinds of Children's Literature that appear in most, if not in all three texts, include Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), the more contemporary C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* novels (1950), A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories like *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928), series books by Enid Blyton like *The Castle of Adventure* (1946), Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* (1935), E. Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), and Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* (1930), among others. Spufford uniquely discusses an array of fantasy and science fiction literature from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series (1954) to Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* (1964-), unlike Sullivan and Mackey. One could do a study of the way Sullivan and Mackey's literary interests compare to Spufford's by gender, but this is out of the scope of my project. Other kinds of literature in these memoirs include fairy tales, oral stories, picture books, and mythology. Taking *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a case study of the way Children's Literature represents a personal and cultural history of childhood, Krips analyzes the way a lot of readers connect to stories like Carroll's, as seen in its presence in all three memoirs. She describes Alice as

> a memory as well as a contemporary presence. We adults like her because she is someone we know, and hasn't changed. She walks of worlds we have lost, both the historical world of her period, the Victorian age of which "heritage" has recently ensured that we have become much enamored, as well as our own childhoods in which we met her fresh paint. And in that childhood we learned that she was someone our parents had known when they were children. She thus connects us to the past in multiple ways. Yet she also retains the freshness that is the concomitant of the readership of children, who approach her with a child's historicism. She is as new to each generation of readers as she was to us (Krips 8).

As children of postwar England and Canada, Spufford, Mackey, and Sullivan do not historically connect to Alice, who is a product of the Victorian era, and did not as children, but do recognize her cultural significance across generations and are still entranced by Carroll's language. Krips defines the postwar British child, in literature "as good a calibration as we are likely to get of cultural change and adaptation, a figure wrought out of a desire for the child, which is a longing for and a fear of a lost self-constructed within the frameworks of a culture," brought about by uncertainty regarding authoritative rights of parents of children in life (Krips 6-7).

Chapter 3: The Importance of Place in Reading

The houses in which we live as children, he says, are our initiation into reality, 'not just through the shape of it, the architecture of it, but through the objects that were in it, the kind of mythology and history it contained (Malouf quoted in Morgan 373).

Sullivan, Spufford, and Mackey's childhoods have been shaped by their first homes, schools, and libraries as well as cultural practices. Place, referring to physical environment and belonging, is central to these memoirs, to retrieving memory, and to developing literacy. Learning to read or write develops from formal and unspoken rules established in a culture. As symbols, our physical surroundings add meaning to words and phrases. Nikolajeva states, "Literature uses language to communicate, and language consists of conventional semiotic signs, based on an agreement between the bearers of a particular language and culture" (Nikolajeva 147). Since learning to read does not exist in a vacuum it is important to consider what factors contribute to literacy, such as where children read. Mackey writes, "My own eyes were 'formed' in St. John's, and that formation is an irrevocable part of this study as well as an inextricable element of my childhood learning" (Mackey 73). Mackey's project is most concerned with place,

as she dives into Newfoundland's history and geography. Like Mackey whose "sense of other people of St. John's...was almost an empty set" in childhood, Bernice Morgan regards her knowledge of Newfoundland's history from childhood as opaque as well in "The Culture of Place." Morgan writes, "Nowhere in *Our Heritage* does the word Newfoundland appear" (Morgan 374). Educational literature, like textbooks, that Mackey and Morgan grew up with in Newfoundland suggest that Canada promoted messages like that of England about heritage; however, they failed to include Newfoundland's distinctive history. Morgan's personal account supports a cultural understanding of childhood, in which place is particularly important to understanding trends in memories of childhood. More unique memories are located within the home, such as in Mackey's childhood bedroom.

Mackey's memories move from her bedroom window to her church, as her conception of space moved from the person to the social, from the local to the global, and from childhood to adulthood. Including a photograph of her and her brother at the window she writes, "I learned my first powers of reading in processing the details and functions of that room and its view of the outside environment. It gave me a core set of physical and ontological understandings of the world that would be essential in learning to make sense of the virtual universe of the different texts I encountered" (59). The relationship between internal sense-making of the child and the outside world is described by Crago who writes, "What is inside us somehow merges with what comes from 'outside'- a story made up by someone we have never met- and the way this happens is the great mystery of the reading experience" (Crago 148). Internalizations of the outside world shape the child's sense of self and their ability to imagine fictional worlds in stories, which "can at times make a kinesthetic claim on readers, enlisting something that can be called *mimetic imagination,* the capacity to enter into a fictional world and make it feel real" (Tatar 13). Jerome

Bruner's *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* defines the subjunctive, which allows readers to imagine possibility, as used "'to express a wish, command, exhortation, or a contingent, hypothetical, or prospective event'" (Bruner 26). Building on cultural and spatial knowledge, the subjunctive allows readers to not only imagine how other characters feel, but how they look and how their settings look. While Bruner describes the subjunctive as a way to imagine possibility in thought, I believe this can extend to the possibility of imagining physical spaces in fiction.

Mackey describes her acquisition of the subjunctive as "doubling" her landscape, where she "overlaid fictional worlds upon the actual one" while reading (Mackey 89). For Mackey, her toolbox of place began in her bedroom on Pennywell Road. Her descriptions of home as a safe space resemble the kinds of literature she read as a child, preferring stories about people's lives, which were familiar. She writes, "My tastes in fiction were then, and remain now, largely realistic and oriented toward relationships" and "Most of the fantasies I enjoyed occupied the border of a world that was clearly perceived as normal by its regular inhabitants, even if some of the details were exotic to me" (Mackey 188). Unlike Spufford, she was less drawn to adventure stories and preferred magic realism, like *Mary Poppins* and *The Borrowers,* which adds the surreal to realistic elements. Her home is also illustrated by her mother, although sloppily, on the face of her chapter, "Other Places, Other Times: Theories of Trajectories" (Mackey 76). She never doubted where she belonged as a child, "on Pennywell Road, in Holloway School, in St. John's, on the Avalon Peninsula," but did so while writing this project (Mackey 365).

Rereading childhood material Mackey states, the 'I" who featured in this expansion exercise was paradoxically more Western at its conclusion than at the start" (Mackey 212). After researching the history of Newfoundland, she realizes that almost all of her literature growing up excluded native people, which forced her to reconsider the whiteness of her "I." Although she

was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia and she visited there four times in her childhood, she never had any doubt about her sense of allegiance or place of belonging. Revisiting for Mackey is also a crucial part of her writing as she states, "I would leave our summer house in Harbour Grace South and go into St. John's on a research outing, intent on visiting an archive or a library. Very often, however, no matter how interesting the files, I would be impelled to walk the old streets of my childhood once again" (Mackey 60). Mackey's interest in retracing steps began in her article "Reading from the Feet Up: The Local Work of Literacy" (2010) in which she describes her "first place," borrowing the term from David Malouf (Mackey, *Feet Up*, 328). Returning to her childhood streets produced "one overwhelming sensation about being back in the city" in which she remarks "*my feet are happy here"* (Mackey 60). Her interest in place extends to her readings of stories like *Winnie-the-Pooh.* One particular illustration of Pooh and Piglet inspecting their footprints in the snow is described by both Mackey and Sullivan as it emphasizes their narrative aims to trace the past (Mackey 489).

Spufford's sense of place is as central to his narrative as Mackey's, in terms of revisiting locations, structuring his narrative, and building upon physical worlds while reading. Where Mackey and Spufford diverge is in Spufford's desire for adventure and his framing of chapters by literary motif. Other than visiting De Smet, South Dakota, he figuratively returns to a familiar childhood forest called Keele Woods through memory. He remembers going into the woods with his babysitter and seeing Piglet there, just like the book they had read. Although Piglet was stitched by his babysitter, the figure seemed to come to life and made an impression. "Looking back," he writes, "I see that moment almost as the first step in a seduction. As a ten-year-old, as a teenager, as an adult, I've always wanted life to be more storylike (Spufford 62). Enhanced by Piglet's setting, Spufford writes, "At the beginning of my life, there was a forest. I grew up in a

staff house on the campus of Keele University, surrounded by institutional concrete" (Spufford 23). He explores the significance of the forest in literature, as a place of transformation and self-discovery. It seems that contextualizing his memory in the woods made that magical moment a reality. Spufford's chapter "The Forest" is an exploration of the dark pastoral, an archetypal setting in childhood that "contains the wildness necessary for creativity and is a natural part of childhood and of our darker feelings" (Natov 7). The forest is the transformative, yet uncertain, place where Hansel and Gretel develop survival skills and where Spufford's favorite characters came into existence in the physical world.

Like Mackey, the library was also a fundamental piece of Spufford's sense of place and he describes it as "The home of the massed possibilities of story" (Spufford 76). Although Spufford's narrative is rooted in England, he was wildly interested in American towns as a child. Reading for Spufford was an adventure and thus, he selected stories in childhood which offered alternate worlds. For example, he read *The Hobbit, The Chronicles of Narnia,* and *Little House on the Prairie.* American stories especially allowed him to be a "pioneer" and escape the pain of his home (114). While Spufford tries not to focus on his sister Bridget, her brittle bone condition led him to read to "turn away" and "banish pity, and brittle bones" (Spufford 17).

Sullivan read as a child for a mix of comfort and adventure and her reading was informed by St. John's Wood, London (not to be confused with Mackey's home in St. John's, Newfoundland). Like the other memoirists, the library was where Sullivan "discovered heaven" and developed her reading habits (Sullivan 5). Her taste in literature, like Mackey's, is largely rooted in "the domestic, peaceful, and secure;" however, she would often read to go on virtual adventures with *The Silent Three* from Horace Boyten's comics (Mackey 110). Even when she journeyed with these fictional characters, the story landscape usually involved school, a familiar

setting. One of the places Sullivan visits for a journalism project that allows her to embody Christopher Robin's story world, is Pooh Bridge in Ashdown Forest, East Sussex, England. At this location she meets A. A. Milne's son, Christopher, who is rather somber and disinterested in the Pooh Bridge event. This meeting taints Sullivan's impression of the story as cheerful, and her impression of A. A. Milne who, according to the text, had a strong relationship with his son. After reading Christopher Robin Milne's autobiography, she learns that the relationship between son and child was strained and perhaps, the Pooh stories were a longing for, not a reflection of, a loving relationship in childhood. She writes, "All this caring means the forest is not the idyllic place I'd remembered" (Sullivan 46). Although prior to this discovery she enjoys her Pooh rereading, her adult views of stories change as she reads biographical accounts of authors.

Chapter 4: Writing and Remembering

Story making and story reading are apparently very different activities, yet they can evoke similar experiences (Crago 2).

Writing "works" like reading a story if we consider the significance of the "performer" in both activities and their emotional responses. "The parallels between the experience of the 'entranced reader' and the 'inspired writer' are, to my mind, inescapable" (Crago 14). Crago describes the importance of "inspired writing" for successful, or critically acclaimed, works of literature (Crago 230). With reading, we often measure the enjoyment of a reader based on their enchantment with the story. While Crago describes fiction writers, I believe his analysis extends to all kinds of writing, like memoirs, which tell personal stories. Where memoir and fiction writing differ is with memory.

Writing a memoir requires recalling personal events, writing those events down, and most

likely organizing those thoughts in a cohesive structure, one suitable for publication. As with all forms of writing, oftentimes the writer does not know what they want to say or why they want to say it until they begin or finish writing- and "not always then" (Crago 1). Memoir writing not only represents the writer's history, but in writing the memoir, history is constructed, specifically a history of the self. As Smith and Watson put it, life narrative is "a moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present" (Smith and Watson 1). What Kate Douglas explores in her chapter, "Creating Childhood: Autobiography and Cultural Memory," is the extent to which memoir writing allows for a "construction of identity, both individual and collective" as well as a creation of a childhood past (Douglas 20). The element of rereading, particular to bibliomemoirs, in combination with writing, allows adults to return to childhood. Douglas writes, "Memory drives autobiography, and, in turn, autobiographies influence perceptions of the ways in which memory functions" and "To write about childhood the author must remember and reconstruct something" (Douglas 21).

Focusing on the key word, "write," memoirs organize thought and connect disparate ideas. Unlike forcing myself to remember the first book I read, which is difficult to sort from other books, if I begin to write about what I remember, this memory comes into fruition. The kinds of readers we were as children, often predicts the kinds of writers we will become, and this rings true for Mackey, Spufford, and Sullivan. Elizabeth Dutro and Monette C. McIver's "Imagining a Writer's Life: Extending the Connection between Readers and Books," states, "one of the powers of literature is how it can inspire a reader to reach for her pen and weave her own magic with words, imagining, imitating, creating, even rebelling" (Dutro and McIver 93). Using a written form to express reactions to reading effectively recalls memory because "it takes advantage of the implicit connections that readers make with all texts" (Dutro and McIver 96).

While Spufford minimally digresses about his writing habits or the creation of his memoir project, Mackey provides an in-depth and honest discussion of what allows her to write, which was revisiting and rereading her materials. The relationship between reading and writing may seem obvious, but its connection to childhood memories is not as blatant.

Sullivan and Mackey share their opposing opinions on the usefulness of writing for accurately remembering the past. Sullivan credits memoir writing for recalling distant memories, while Mackey refrains from using writing to create a cohesive memory. In Sullivan's account of her father's voice during bedtime, she writes, "It's only now as I'm writing this that I realize my father was using the ritual phrases to hypnotise me into sleep" (Sullivan 4). She never had a reason to reflect on her bedtimes stories, specifically her father's "Septimus the Frog" stories that "always ended the same way: 'Down, down, dived Septimus to the bottom of the pond…" (Sullivan 4). The sequence of those words and the repetition of hearing them were not successful at putting Sullivan to sleep, but rather created a craving for more stories. If Sullivan had not set out to write this project, she may not have reflected on the significance of this moment. Further, she takes notes as she rereads, having "filled a whole page of [her] notebook with Kiki's vocabulary" (the parrot in Enid Blyton's *The Castle of Adventure*). For Sullivan, memoir writing serves as a useful way to organize thoughts and to recall memories. On the contrary, Mackey abstains from narrative writing in order to produce more accurate accounts of childhood.

Mackey believes "the villain is the narrative impulse that ruthlessly eliminates the randomness in favour of a streamlined and tellable set of causal relations" (Mackey 19). In her introduction, she relies on texts and materials, rather than her memories, to illuminate her childhood literacy. She refrains from "pruning" her recollections, cutting away unremembered parts and unclear glimpses, which create a cohesive narrative. As with recalling a dream, putting

thoughts into words necessarily changes the impression of the memory; Mackey believes writing detracts from the imperfections of memory. Of course, when memories are recalled they lack the exactness of the original experience, but for Mackey, writing takes that recreation one step further, eliminating the "randomness" she finds so appealing (Mackey 19). Therefore, she tries not to "expand these gleams and glimpses into any coherent narrative" and instead, "turn[s] to the remembered texts for greater detail" (Mackey 25). Mackey and Sullivan's writing habits as children directly correlate to their projects now; Spufford only reflects on learning to write. As Brandt discovers, remembering childhood writing is unusually difficult for adults since most American children before 1980 were not encouraged to write creatively or outside of school.

Deborah Brandt's "Remembering Writing, Remembering Reading" reveals the extent to which people remember writing vs. reading in childhood and the significance of those recollections. After studying forty residents in Dane County, Wisconsin in 1992-93, across a wide spectrum of age and race, she discovers that while "people typically remembered their first reading experiences as pleasurable occasions, endorsed if not organized by adults...many early writing experiences, particularly those set outside of school, were remembered as occurring out of the eye of adult supervision" (Brandt 461). Unlike memories of reading, memories of writing were often associated with "feelings of loneliness, secrecy, and resistance" (Brandt 461). Participants in Brandt's study could mostly remember their first reading experiences and having the support of their family to read, even when parents faced language barriers, since "reading and the teaching of reading were widely considered as a normal part of responsible care of young children" (Brandt 463). However, memories of writing, especially a "first" memory of writing, was difficult for many participants to retrieve. For example, a 68 year old man states "'It's difficult to remember writing as a separate activity'" while Brandt notes that memories of writing

often "went under the rubrics of 'work'" (Brandt 466). Adults' memories of writing were either of their parents paying bills, with the exception of a few participants whose parents encouraged creative writing, or of writing in a secret diary. Some of the reasons for these narrative results include that creative writing was not commonly taught in American public schools in the 1950s-1970s and "historical accounts of writing-reading relationships in school typically stress their structural dissociation" (Brandt 473). When writing was recalled in school it was more expository than creative; some adults remembered writing book reports. Other reasons writing is not recollected with reading is that it may not be valued. Unlike calling oneself an "'avid reader'" participants, including a published poet, are hesitant about calling themselves a writer (Brandt 468). What Brandt's study reveals is that personal narratives of reading differ from those of writing although many credit learning to write through reading and vice versa. Applying Brandt's results to my bibliomemoirs, provides historical and cultural background for studying memoirs of literacy. It also acutely relates writing and reading to memory. Since self-writing and consciousness about the writing process is a major aspect of memoirs, it is worth noting how abundances of literary memories relate to the meager memories of writing.

Childhood Memories of Writing

Spufford, Sullivan, and Mackey include their earliest memories of writing, unlike most of Brandt's participants, perhaps because they are published authors and occupational writers. For Spufford, he recalls straining to read *The Hobbit's* words until he reached language fluency. He states, "By the time I reached *The Hobbit's* last page, though, writing had softened, and lost the outlines of the printed alphabet, and became a transparent liquid, first viscous and sluggish… then even thinner… until it reached me at the speed of thinking" (Spufford 65). As a courageous

reader, Spufford opened J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* as soon as he learned to read around his "sixth birthday" (Spufford 64). Spufford's history of writing is intertwined with reading as "writing had ceased to be a thing- an object in the world- and *become* a medium, a substance you look through" (Spufford 65). While Spufford does not detail how he learned to write he does describe the impression of writing on reading fluently. He continues to discuss Noam Chomsky's theories about an innate linguistic ability and writes that "if it is true that we process the written word so it communicates with us in the mind's own language, it is not surprising that writing can be so powerful" (Spufford 66-67). That is, if our innate physical characteristics support written language, effective written expressions of our thoughts can be powerful. Writing for Spufford became an easy practice once he learned to read, and this is therefore why he values stories.

Sullivan's memories of writing in childhood are attributed to her reading habits. Sullivan writes, "Reading in turn led to a desire to write, and I became a journalist- and much later, a fiction writer" (Sullivan 7). Some of her earliest memories of writing are connected to her earliest memories of reading her father's daily comic strip, *Colonel Pewter in Ironicus.* Although she "could barely read then" she was entranced by the pictures in the comics and continued "reading" the pictures until she understood the words. She writes, "As soon as I could form words, I was giving my characters balloons, and putting words in them" (Sullivan 106). The balloons she refers to are speech bubbles, which occupied her earliest "efforts at telling stories [which so happened to be] in cartoon strip form" (Sullivan 106). Her father created one of his main characters, Martin, to represent his daughter, although Sullivan is unsure why he was a boy. While her creative writing habits were not restricted by her parents, they did not "approve of comics for children… which made them all the more desirable" (Sullivan 106-07). Like Brandt's participants who remember writing in secret, censored or forbidden reading attracts children's

interests and led to Sullivan's favorite comics, *The Silent Three* by Horace Boyten and Stewart Pride. Sullivan's chapter, "The Flashing Eyes of Betty Roland" compares her memories of this comic to her readings today. As with her other chapters, she tries to sustain hypotheses about why she reads, which changes as she rereads new literature. For these comics, she comes to the realization that she "needed heroes" in childhood and characters like Betty Roland could save her from childhood "injustices" (Sullivan 127-128).

Sullivan is reminded of her identity as a child writer and its influence on her occupation today by rereading *Little Women*. Unlike her best friends, she despised *Little Women* as a child partly because she was jealous of Jo March. She writes, "Every budding young writer is expected to identify with this girl I remembered as Beth, the writer in the family, but I didn't even though at the time I was budding all over the place- filling notebooks with half-completed stories and drawing comics" (Sullivan 130). She quickly realizes that it is Jo, not Beth, who is the character she remembers and that her hatred for Jo is rooted in the "fact that [she] never revised anything, and never finished anything" (Sullivan 141). Although she wrote an illustrated "magnus opum….quest tale entitled 'The Shoski'" she was never proud of the work she produced as a child. She resented her mother, who had good intentions, for secretly bringing her story to a publisher which came back with a rejection (Sullivan 141).

Mackey too was a writer as a child, who kept lockable diaries, self-written cowboy game instructions, and scrapbooks of her "pedestrian" life (Mackey 349). While she is quick to disregard the quality of her child work, her records become meaningful ways of tracking the passage of time and growth. She writes, "On two occasions (birthday 1959 and Christmas 1961), I received lockable five-year diaries," which helped with "pinning down some daily details of time passing, one of the major accomplishments of literacy" (Mackey 403). She describes her

own diaries as “excruciatingly dull or painfully self-remonstrating on the subject of unkept resolutions” as she rereads a diary entry around her pre-teen years which longs to eat less, cry less, set her bed, and be more honest (Mackey 403). Mackey has been a memoirist her whole life, engaging with diverse forms of life writing since childhood, especially the diary form, which is still popular among young girls. Further, her scrapbooking, which required her to collect, edit, arrange, cut and glue, (all borrowed terms from Mackey) highly resembles her auto-bibliography. In the context of Brandt’s study, Mackey’s memories of creative writing, like that of Sullivan, are unusual. One of Mackey's most detailed memories, which are uncommon throughout her book, involve cursive writing. As discussed, it the space of the house that incites this memory which she describes as such:

> In this space was propped an old, small blackboard, and, because it was raining, I was sent out there to amuse myself with a piece of chalk. I have vivid recollections of attempting cursive writing. I was not interested in making meaning with this writing, I wanted to produce a surface facsimile that simply looked like cursive. I could do some basic printing at that point, having just completed Kindergarten, but I knew that real power lay in joined-up writing, and I was eager to gain access to that power. I have felt a *frisson* of overwhelming security any time I stand under a roof looking out at summer rain. It is an entirely satisfying memory, and the details of that particular day have grounded my sense of becoming literate for six decades (Mackey 76).

Unpacking this memory, which granted child Mackey a form of agency and “power” that has carried her through adult life, she recalls the impact of writing with chalk in “joined-up” letters to produce a higher form of language, that being cursive. While she does not describe from whom she learned cursive, perhaps from her mother, as a child she knew that this form of writing was reserved for the “elite” whether of age or intelligence. The importance of setting to this powerful memory adds to Mackey’s ability to remember, as the “frisson” occurs when raining, during the Summer, and under a roof- all descriptors of that memory past. The sense of security she now feels as an adult is attributed to the abundance of sensory details of this memory. While

writing allows for recollection, rereading and revisiting physical sites have similar effects by allowing for memory retrieval. A bit about how memory "works" or rather, how scientists and scholars understand memory, will help me discuss what can and cannot be remembered. What Brandt's study and my own aims to do is "make meaning *of* reading and writing" unlike an abundance of literacy studies on "how people make meaning *through* reading and writing" (Brandt 460). While I am also interested in what gets translated through these memoirs, my argument relies on features of memoir writing and memoirists' perception of their own literacy.

Chapter 5: How Memory Works

I do remember, and when I try to remember, I forget (Milne 23).

As discussed in my introduction, memoirs of childhood reading have a special relationship to the memoir genre in that they physically reengage with childhood material. The element of rereading and writing alters and builds upon memories of childhood reading that may otherwise be left unremembered. Charles Fernyhough's *Pieces of Light: How the New Science of Memory Illuminates the Stories We Tell About Ourselves* provides the contemporary science about memory in relation to autobiographical writing. He states that while there is still controversy about how memory should be viewed, noting that scientific journals promote false data, studies show that memory is more reconstructive than photographic. Fernyhough compares memory to a "habit, a process of constructing something from its parts, in similar but subtly changing ways each time, whenever the occasion arise" (Fernyhough 6). It is false to presume that memory is stable or static, due to socialization and the passage of time, and like "mental DVDs" (Fernyhough 7). Rather, every time a memory is remembered, our perceptions rely on the initial episode being properly stored and encoded, and then, the information is reconstructed

for retrieval. The reconstructive view of memory can be traced back to Sir Frederic Bartlett's experiment at the University of Cambridge on subjects' memory of a Native American folktale in 1932. The reconstructive view of memory also accepts the malleability of memory and uncertainty around the credibility of remembered past events. While memory is unreliable, in that it often cannot be retrieved without change, an analysis of memories from childhood prompted by rereading reveals interesting patterns. For example, all three memoirists remember illustrated texts. To briefly discuss the kinds of memory involved with autobiographical works, I rely on Fernyhough's descriptions.

Autobiographical memory may be described as having two layers of functioning. The first layer refers to the accessibility of memory to our consciousness. Explicit or declarative memory is that which is accessible to our consciousness while implicit or nondeclarative memory is stored in the unconscious, explored by psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud for its wealth of meaning. The second layer of autobiographical memory refers to the kinds of information stored and the length of storage. Semantic memory, which is "memory for facts" can be stored for short or long term, and episodic memory, which is "memory for events" is often stored for long term (Fernyhough 12). The term semantic may be replaced by cognitive memory and episodic by phenomenological memory, which I believe better captures the extent of emotion or sensation remembered during an event. What distinguishes autobiographical memory from other kinds of memory, like historical memory, is that it relies on first person memory or rather, the "rememberer's capacity to reinhabit the recalled moment and experience it again from the inside" (Fernyhough 15). Fernyhough's interest in personal narratives, which cannot necessarily be replicated in experimentation and has therefore been understudied, compares to my own interest in analyzing how revisited material transforms and/or affirms memories from

childhood.

How Memoirists Depict Memory

When Mackey writes, "I am not trying to expand these gleams and glimpses into any coherent narrative; my approach is to take my flicker of memory and then turn to the remembered text for greater detail" she distinguishes her written memory from Spufford and Sullivan's (Mackey 25). Mackey distances herself from normative features of memoirs, such as creating coherent narratives from memory, by only utilizing small fragments of memory to illuminate the physical literature she revisits. It is the left hemisphere of the brain that "is ultimately responsible for turning shapeless, dream-like sequences of events [like memories] into strongly patterned narratives that command interest and attention from people we do not know" (Crago 13). This limits the extent to which I can argue for a connectedness to her child self through reflections on reading, which are brief in nature. Therefore, while I am as concerned with what is explicitly stated in the text, I also analyze what is implicit.

Aside from the use of chapter titles, other formal features of these texts like visual representations recall memories from childhood. Mackey includes photography, illustration, and maps. Sullivan includes the covers of her selected stories, short anecdotes about other authors' reactions to stories, and short quotations that seem poignant in her memoir. While Spufford does not have any visual representations, he does include theory, thereby other scholars' voices, as does Mackey and to a lesser extent, Sullivan. Including these other media not only distinguishes bibliomemoirs from other kinds, which do not rely on theory and physical literature, but it also recognizes the lives of others. As stated earlier, memoirs often include the voices of figures beyond the narrating self who are essential to a life story.

Mackey and Sullivan's memoirs utter the voices of their parents, both implicitly, as they absorb their parents' values and expectations, and explicitly, as they ask and include their parents' impressions on stories. Smith and Watson discuss how memoirs are often relational and include "significant others, those whose stories are deeply implicated in the narrator's and through whom the narrator understands his or her own self-formation" (Smith and Watson 86). For example, Mackey discusses the book *Mr. Bear Squash-You-All-Flat* with her parents, the only book she discussed retrospectively, who admit they "detested it" because of its simple nature and popularity at bedtime read-alouds (Mackey 108). Returning to this childhood book, it may be easy to succumb to Mackey's adult views and those of her parents to dismiss the quality or past appreciation for the text; however, utilizing Richard Gerrig's concept of anomalous suspense, she enjoyed the book because each time she read it she was surprised by the ending. She also describes identifying with the emotions of the animals whom Mr. Bear scared, through illustration and text.

Mackey's interest in illustration seems to stem from her parents' treasury of photography. Her memoir's inclusion of visual aids also emphasizes a connection between sight and reading, as we learn to see before we can read or write. Mackey includes a photograph of herself as a baby, which traces her literacy acquisition to birth as "the baby's name is an important literacy marker. That name will very often be the first word a child learns to read" (Mackey 238). That name is not only one of the first read, but one of the first written and heard. "Preserved within two (inevitably pink) commercial baby books…. crammed into a little box among my parents' papers" were the documents that shaped her identity as a girl born in Halifax, Nova Scotia and quickly moved to Newfoundland.

The Relationship of Childhood Reading to Remembering

Fernyhough's examination of memory unveils the complexity of memory's storage and retrieval through a scientific/psychological background. Applying Fernyhough's information on autobiographical memory shows how valuable memoirs of childhood reading are to retrieving childhood memories and to differentiating what has been imagined or recalled based on "true" events. Since books are stable objects they prove unwavering in comparison to memory. Mackey emphasizes the value of her books, which "represent the main, indeed the only, stable element in the story of…[her] reading past" (Mackey 6). She writes, "When I check out what I remember and compare it with the actual materials, I find my memory fragments are largely accurate" (Mackey 25). After rereading, she finds that many of her plot summaries are correct, unlike Sullivan. By referring to literature as a "'scriptive thing,'" a term adopted by Mackey from Robin Bernstein, Mackey legitimizes her memory and her study. Scriptive things, like literature, are those which "invite particular forms of performance" and by rereading the same literature Mackey can "recreate the invitation of the scriptive text" by relying on cultural context to deduce the initial use or purpose for reading (Mackey 19).

As a scriptive thing, reading is a full sensory experience and because of its relationship to place, it is easier to recall than an abstract memory. Memories of storytime may be easier to recall because of the addition of sound to reading. Sensory signals have been proven to help recall memory and when coded with meaning, to strengthen details of a memory and the speed with which a memory is recalled. I argue that rereading, as done in bibliomemoirs, amplifies the experience of a memory- the detail to which something is recalled and the emotional engagement with the literature in the present. A memory of reading, much like the literature itself, allows for a rich narrative to be retrieved. The way we frame our memories resemble literary sequences,

with a beginning, middle, and end. In memoirs of childhood reading, figurative language and imagery are often employed to recreate past sensations of reading.

Reading and rereading, like visiting a location, helps recall memories in childhood which can be difficult to imagine and retrieve. The act of reading can produce emotional responses, which may not be conjured without a sensory signal or prompt. Autobiographical memories of reading affirm semantic memory, both of the context of the story and the historical act of reading the book as a child. Memories of reading also recreate episodic memory, details of the event, all while adding a new layer of short term memory. For memoirists of reading, who revisit literature, many readings are also stored for long term. Understanding memories' relationship to memoir writing helps affirm our sense of self, how we once were and are now, but can also complicate notions of identity. Rereading helps us sympathize and relate to the child we once were by producing emotional responses comparable to those felt, or remembered to have been felt, upon first reading.

Children's Literatures' nature, meaning the way it embodies nostalgia and encourages imaginative thinking, also has what Valerie Krips calls "a special place in memory" (Krips 15). In her second chapter of *The Presence of the Past: Memory, Heritage, and Childhood in Postwar Britain* Krips writes, "Memorializing the child it represents, it offers itself as a site of memory, both for the child reader who is concerned to engage with the text, and for the adult, for whom books of childhood are a symbol of the past" (Krips 15). In her dialogue with Maurice Halbwachs, credited for developing the concept of collective memory, Krips acknowledges the way children's stories incite adults to reflect on their pasts as the literature often features children protagonists. Like Halbwachs, she recognizes that the past we remember, especially in relation to childhood stories, is influenced by time passed and cultural memories of childhood- such as a

pastoral or "happy" childhood. Mackey includes Krips in her introduction chapter to justify her exploration of childhood texts. She quotes Krips who states, "the children's book is capable of returning the past to us through its existence as an object that we remember from our earliest years, one which may come to represent that past for us" (Mackey 5). Mackey finds support for her project with another memoirist, Lewis Buzbee, who wrote *The Yellow Lighted Bookshop* (2017). He writes that "'to remember a book is to remember the child who read that book'" thus claiming that in remembering reading, it is possible to differentiate the child from the adult's perception of the child (Mackey 5). Fernyhough's study on autobiographical memory also points to an implicit relationship between memory and reading, as he refers to memory as "a great storyteller" which "rel[ies] on a form of imagination" (Fernyhough 18). It may be that our recollections are informed by reading patterns, or rather, when we describe what we remember, we frame our narratives in story-like ways. Mackey points to this phenomenon in her discussion on "the Murk," a borrowed term from Wayne Johnson which describes what cannot be remembered.

What Cannot be Remembered

I do remember, and when I try to remember, I forget (Mackey 118 of A. A. Milne).

While my project, and the majority of these memoirists' projects, focus on what can be remembered, what cannot be is also enlightening. The murk refers to details that are forgotten, whether while rereading or in early childhood such as around two or three years old. Mackey writes, "As with most people, my memories of learning to read for myself are also largely Murkbound" (Mackey 134). While she does not describe why these memories are murkbound, it seems that memories before acquired literacy are hard to recall because they lack the frames of

literature. In a brief account of Mackey's earliest memory of "dust gleaming in sunbeams after [her] father took up the floorboards in the main hall of the Pennywell Road flat," she writes that "the memory contains no narrative element- no before or after" (Mackey 105). Mackey lacks a linear understanding of that memory, surely because of her pre-developed brain at the age of two and half, but also because she had yet to learn to read. She cannot remember ever not knowing "how stories work or know there was a boundary between fiction and daily world" and therefore, most of her memories relate to reading and are informed by reading practices. Crago describes the murk of early childhood, or "early childhood amnesia," as the pre-development of the left hemisphere, which is responsible for language and distinguishing past from present (Crago 238). He states, "Until the advent of language in the second year of life, memories cannot be encoded in words, and so are largely inaccessible to conscious attempts at retrieval. Moreover, the hippocampus, which assists with conscious memory formation, only matures fully after the third year of life. Thus it seems that nearly all of us really do 'forget' some of the most momentous events of our early lives, and we cannot access them at will" (Crago 238). This kind of lapse in memory seems to be untrue for Spufford who, as I discuss in Chapter 4, does recount learning to read and write before becoming fluently literate. For Sullivan, she does not include any records of the murk, aside from forgetting plot details, but does acknowledge purposeful attempts throughout her childhood to forget painful moments. For example, when her mother submitted her story to the publisher she cannot remember what the report said because she drew "a veil over" it (Sullivan 142). She uses the veil metaphor again, when she recalls leaving a theater production of *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame as a child. Scary animal masks, lighting, and chanting led Sullivan crying out of the theater, to which she is now embarrassed and ashamed. She states, "I never felt the same terror reading the book as I felt in the theatre"

and “My memory seems to have drawn a veil over the details: maybe they were too harrowing” (Sullivan 157). It is unclear whether Sullivan cannot recall this moment in detail because of the terror it produced or rather, because of the shame she incurred. However, this memory does prove how overcoming adaptations of literature can be for children, as well as how resourceful we can be in preserving the happiest and best representations of ourselves. The physical reactions Sullivan had while rereading this story, as well as Mackey’s attempt to understand why she cannot remember early childhood may be clarified through an analysis of how we reread.

Chapter 6: The Addition of Rereading

Rereading, as a way to return to childhood through narration, voice, character, and emotional response, was practiced by Mackey, Spufford, and Sullivan before writing their memoirs. Rereading may defined as “a treat, a form of escape, a device for getting to sleep or for distracting oneself, a way to evoke memories (not only of the text but of one’s life and of past selves), a remind of half-forgotten truths, an inlet to new insight. It rouses or soothes, provokes or reassures” (Spacks 2). All three memoirists engage with rereading for their projects and specifically define their methods for rereading. Spufford tries to become the reader he had been when [he] encountered each [story] for the first time” and therefore, significantly describes the emotional responses reading produces (Spufford 21). Sullivan selects a dozen stories with significance, recording her memory of them and then, her new reactions. She does not exclude memories which may be “hazy, or quite wrong,” but considers these memories valuable as well. She also includes biographical information about her authors, since she has a “journalist’s curiosity” and includes a hypothesis for why the book was significant in her childhood (Sullivan 9). I do not focus on her hypotheses because they are rather flimsy and change from one book to

the next. In my conclusion, I describe her final list of reasons for why she read as a child. Lastly, Mackey begins her rereadings with "affective events" as she now remembers them and then turns "to the texts that were involved in these events because today they represent [her] best and least-edited access to experiences of the past" (Mackey 19). Unlike Spufford and Sullivan, she revisits literacy material from prayer hymns and board games to picture books and maps. Her rereadings are less emotional as she places focus on the material themselves. All authors agree with Crago's sentiment that, "Only after a story has stirred up our emotions will we start reflecting on them in a conscious way" (Crago 12).

Rereading may be performed at any time of life for various reasons as seen in all three memoirs, with some writers like Mackey and Sullivan choosing to reread as children. Bibliomemoirs make a special case for using reader-response theory in that these kinds of texts place reader response at the forefront. Sullivan writes, "I read many of my childhood books over and over again" and "Alice's adventures were always at or near the top of my favourite book list, and I re-read them many times. They grew more familiar, and yet, never lost their strangeness" (Sullivan 7, 17). Sullivan and Mackey have been avid rereaders since childhood, comforted by the familiarity of favorites like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* Mackey preferred rereading to new material she "found boring" (Mackey 231). As Patricia Meyer Spacks discusses in *On Rereading,* "Trying to account for this passion for sameness, we may say that it reveals the toddler's need for security. In a world crammed with new experiences, exciting yet unpredictable, the child treasures what she can hold on to" (Spacks 1). While Spacks is referring to toddlers, the same holds true for Mackey and Sullivan in their elementary school years. For Spacks, whose book is also an autobiographical exploration of her joyful rereading habits from childhood, rereading reveals a "dynamic tension between stability and change" (Spacks 4). It

may seem obvious that when rereading, we feel a sense of security both because of pre-existing knowledge of content to come and because rereading reminds us of our childhoods, of a time secured in the past. Rereading can feel safe if it recalls similar emotions from childhood and if the same physical copy is used. As embodied readers, the book influences our memories and recall. This is why Sullivan notes her rereading copy in each chapter, from an economic copy of *The Wind in the Willows* (without an introduction, footnotes, etc.) to a borrowed copy of *Little Women.* Spufford does not describe the types of copies he rereads and Mackey notes when a copy is originally from childhood, especially books passed down from her grandmother. Rereading can provide security in the form of nostalgia as well as of our past selves. Like diary writing, rereading can recall who we once were and says something about who we are now. Spacks states, "the stability of reread books helps to create a solid sense of self" (Spacks 4). Spacks quotes William Hazlitt, who writes about rereading as recalling "the same feelings and associations" which serve as "'links in the chain of our conscious being'" (Spacks 4). However, as much as rereading tracks who we once were, it also traces growth and thereby, changes in the self. There can be a security in tracing growth through books and the passage of time, but also uneasiness as readers change. All three memoirists recall this sense of uneasiness with age and remark how rereading, as a child and adult, produces competing feelings of security and unrest.

Growing or "Reading Up"

The kinds of books these memoirists read are relative to the desires and needs they had at different milestones in childhood. Spufford, Mackey, and Sullivan stop their memoirs at adolescence, in part to limit their narratives to childhood and so, we, as readers, get a sense of growth up until 13. Sullivan writes, "By the time I was thirteen and hormones and peer group

pressure were at work, I was keen to read about romance and sex, but the years seven to eleven were a time when most boys in stories were courteous brotherly figures" (131). She remembers not being able to match her romantic desires to the pre-teen literature she was allowed, which led her to the top shelf of her parents' room to find what she describes as her "pornography," a collection of decadent and horror stories titled, *Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural* (Sullivan 271). Even as a child, she recalls "that in-between time" when she "believed in both the fairy palace and the greenhouse," the greenhouse appeared like a glowing fairy palace outside of Sullivan's window and even after she knew it was a greenhouse, she continued to believe in the "magic" of the sight (Sullivan 178).

Mackey also notes a particular moment in her childhood, which made her feel insecure as a reader. "I recall very clearly my sense of desolation as I looked at these unfamiliar shelves and realized I had suddenly lost the value and utility of my familiar toolkit of loved authors, series knowledge and general capacity to size up a book" (Mackey 226). At the Gosling Memorial Library on Duckworth Street, to which she includes photographs, she remembers moving to the older children's section and not knowing what to grab. She disliked Dickens "as entirely too wordy and strange," but "did take to Jane Austen" at twelve years old (Mackey 226). Calling her growth, "reading up," she writes that at thirteen years old, she was moving toward adulthood "more rapidly" through reading and "had begun to redefine" herself as "a cautiously aspirant reader" (Mackey 232). Mackey also notes a difference in the kind of rereader she was and is today; as a child, she read passively without concern for literary elements and as an adult, she "actively" reads. The kinds of literature a child reads is usually a good indicator of the child's age and interests that constantly change with growth. Crago traces accomplished writers' desires, like Charles Dickens and Hans Christian Andersen's, from infancy to old age through a

biographical history of their lives. Pulling moments throughout their lives which he finds represented in their own literature, he draws a parallel between stories and lived experience. For example, in "middle childhood," he notes that famous authors are often attached to the places which made them feel safe. He describes these places as "locus amoenus," or pleasant place, evoking "wonder and delight… with a sense of safety and enclosure. It is sensuous, but pre-sexual, giving it a special 'pure' magic that is lost in dreams" (Crago 88). This "place of greater safety," which for Sullivan and Mackey was home, explains why they enjoyed realism in literature, which even in an adventure story "combines the appeal of the familiar and the exotic [and] mixes delight with protection from danger" (Crago 88). Spufford's detailed memory at thirteen reveals how his desires changed and the kinds of terror rereading can create as an adult.

Spufford often gravitated toward adventure stories because of the instability of his own home. Bridget's illness consumed his parents' time and before new drugs, she was prescribed a few years to live. In his last chapter, "The Hole," which begins at his boarding school, he recalls scary read alouds among his friends. Interested in literature about towns and community over the individual at nine years old, such as *Little House on the Prairie,* the adult Spufford considers the kinds of communities, like school, that he knew as a child. These communities or "societies" range from the gatherings his father had before his sister became ill to boarding school described as "a town of children" with "deep connections of family nowhere" (Spufford 150). He states, "Though Narnia did not yet lose its power, when I was nine and ten I chose more and more stories that operated inside this circle: that took me to town" (Spufford 113). Spufford recalls a scary story of a child named Wally who became so obese he began eating other children. Wally's parents, who were fitness fanatics, intended to kill Wally, but Spufford never had the courage to hear the story until the end. He writes, "I never did hear how Wally turned the tables and (of

course) ate his parents, until I reread the story to write this book, an experience that was not so much frightening in the present tense as haunted by the memory of my gradually increasing terror at thirteen" (Spufford 153-154). Spufford could not hear the story's end, which he realizes as an adult, because he was "on the cusp between childhood and adolescence, just beginning [his] own transitions between one regime of appetites and another whose outlines were not" yet clear (Spufford 157). At thirteen, he feared his changing desires and who he could become, like Wally. This memory is visceral to adult Spufford and exemplifies the kinds of changes growing up has on literature. It also reveals the impact of reading on memoirs, as Spufford and Sullivan's narratives trace self-growth through the sophistication of literature and realizations about the self; perhaps, every memoir reveals self-growth. As a reader of this chapter, I was also entranced by this moment and credit Spufford for his skillful hand.

I present my own observation in reaction to Crago's point on how stories preserve their "magic." He states, "stories exist because they *convey meaning analogically*, without the necessity for analysis or conscious thinking. As soon as we attempt to convert that communication into 'digital' form (words, abstract concepts), it loses its power- the coach turns back into a pumpkin" (Crago 11). Bibliomemoirs present a paradox to this theory in that they retell those stories, often "magically," after cognitive and conscious consideration of their meaning, which as Crago describes would theoretically lose their effective power. Crago raises this point with regard to differences between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, which both work in tandem to create a story, but in different ways; the right takes in the story as a whole and the left breaks it apart. I argue that memoirs, as a kind of story, work because they surround their narratives around the self and around personal memories that tell their own stories. While the story of Wally is interesting, I relate to Spufford's account of adolescence in

reaction to this story, which preserves the magic. One of the challenges Spufford, Sullivan, and Mackey face while rereading, on a perhaps unconscious level, is conveying the child reader in writing, having an adult's perspective. I select a few moments where these tensions create what I term an adult vs. child voice based upon the kinds of readers they become while rereading, whether that be active or passive reading.

Chapter 7: Child vs. Adult Voice: Illustrating the Child

Another hugely important aspect of these books is what they led me to see, both on the page and in my head. The illustrations and the maps on the endpapers were vital parts of my memory and the first things I looked at when I started my re-reading, and they invariably invoked a flood of new memories (Sullivan 320).

It is impossible to know what the child *really* knew and their view "of that world is no more restorable than the vanished house in the street-scene image," which no longer stands on Pennywell Street (Mackey 36). However, there are moments when as we remember, we adopt a child's voice, allowing our memories to stream from our mouths or hands as unfiltered as possible. I distinguish these voices as a result of active vs. passive reading. Active reading, as T.J. Wilson's "Honoring Every Reader's Path to Active Reading" states, occurs when "the mind analyzes and synthesizes and creates while the body extends and records and makes permanent our mind in tangible ways. We reflect and then reflect upon our reflections- for there are thoughts and playgrounds to be found in text" (Wilson 7). Actively reading requires observing details beyond the surface of a text, such as inferring what comes next and how and why a message is conveyed. Unlike passive or "pleasure reading," which follows the journey of a text without questioning the narrator or characters, active reading must be worked at (Wilson 8).

Wilson cites Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren's *How to Read a Book* (1940), which notes the importance of writing to active reading, as the reader writes their reactions to compensate for short-term memory. Wilson compares reading and writing to the relationship "a catcher and pitcher have in baseball" since both players work together to predict the direction of the ball, or for the reading metaphor, the direction of the story (Wilson 7). As described previously, active reading does not eliminate the joy of reading, but rather, it possibly adds a surprising layer of enjoyment about context beneath the text's surface. When all three memoirists came to write about their active reading experiences as adults, they struggled with "drinking a magic elixir, experiencing the kind of sensory overload that eliminates the noise of critical inquiry," but found middle ground in what Tatar refers to as "the contact zone" while writing their memoirs (Tatar 4). While Spufford and Sullivan have no reservations about applying figurative language to their recollections to capture their child sentiments, Mackey refrains from this narrative style.

There are moments, when against Mackey's intentions she does detail the operation of her child mind. For example, she writes "I can see our fingers (small on the page) tracing the imaginary dotted line of Mr. Bear's bounce into the overhanging branch" and "I have vivid memories of enjoying the grief and fear of the little animals throughout the duration of the story" (Mackey 110). She visualizes this memory and her hand on the page, temporarily embodying her child self. When she does allow the child's voice to come through, many of her recollections surround illustration. She both visualizes her child self and recalls the picture books that had her play games of *mise en abyme*, in which an image would be placed on another. She writes, "I loved the figure-and-ground game of *mise en abyme* that is encapsulated in the image where children are reading a book featuring a picture of themselves on the cover. The ache in my brain

that I felt when I tried to pursue that picture into smaller and smaller incarnations" (Mackey 124). Mackey can feel that ache again as she rereads *Prayer for a Child* and *Small Rain* by Rachel Field, both illustrated by Orton Jones. Although these books are not conventional stories, in that there is no plot, they showed Mackey how to pray as a child and intellectually stimulated her through the complex illustrations. She writes, "I loved being able to find the items featured in close-up located in their proper places in the room; that back-and-forth game was my favourite element in that book and the first thing I looked for when I found it again as an adult, many decades after I last put it down as a child" (Mackey 124). As an adult, she is drawn to "play" that figure-and-ground game again, allowing her critical adult voice to sit back. These moments contrast from the majority of her project, in which her adult, critical voice is at the forefront and which allows her to draw conclusions about her past. For example, she states, "I quite liked being a child" and "reading about change in Anne changed me as a reader" (Mackey 200). These are impressions that could only be made as an adult.

Sullivan also adopts a child's voice when she refers to E. Nesbit's books, which she describes as glowing "brightly like a jar of multicloured lollies" (Sullivan 179). The magic of her stories are vivid in color and are likened to lollipops, a child's treat. With many of her recollections she aims for honest writing, in spite of embarrassment at developing an accent that "was a bit cockney, a bit Home Counties whine" at primary school (Sullivan 207). She acquires an accent after learning from books that being posh or elite was bad. Lastly, longing to go on adventures in her readings, she recalls emotional responses to the kinds of words used in *Winnie-the-Pooh: The House at Pooh Corner* such as "copse," "spinney," and "meadow," which "sent a shiver through" her; these words recall the English countryside, which as an "urban child" Sullivan wanted to visit (Sullivan 38). Sullivan's rereadings of illustration evoke an adult voice,

unlike Mackey, but do emphasize a relationship between visual art and remembering.

"So even my picture books turned out to be a cultural minefield," writes Sullivan about *The Magic Pudding* by Norman Lindsay and *Complete Adventures of Snugglepot and Cuddlepie* by May Gibbs after visiting Australia at twenty-eight (Sullivan 204). Having Australian-born parents, many of Sullivan's books came from Australia, but having knowledge of London's landscape, and not Australia, she had no cultural reference for Banksia or eucalyptus trees illustrated in these books. Like her experience visiting Pooh Bridge, a place she frequented in her mind, when she reaches Australia she has a "strong sense of deja vu" and learns about Australia's aborigine art depicted in these stories (Sullivan 203). She has similar complex analyses of Stuart Tresilian's black-and-white illustrations, who illustrated many of Enid Blyton's stories. Oddly enough, she did and still does not "need" color to re-enjoy these stories. She describes his work as "melodramatic but meticulously realistic, with a theatrical use of light and dark" (Sullivan 74). About Evelyn Flinders' illustrations for *The Silent Three* series she writes, "Although the illustrations invest the text with a high seriousness" and "I could barely read then, and lots of words were too hard to pronounce or understand, but that didn't stop me, particularly as much of the humor was in the pictures" (Sullivan 105). The illustrations are integral to enjoying the stories all over again. Sullivan not only viewed images as a child, treating them like scriptive things, she "scribbled over the drawings with coloured pencils" believing she was "improving them vastly" (Sullivan 157-158).

Spufford embodies his child self by attributing mental states like becoming "frustrated" and exhausted at leaving childhood toward the uncertainty of adolescence. While a reader, like myself, might forget that Spufford is recalling childhood, due to the sophistication of his language, emotional language helps express his child's voice. He writes, "In the holidays, I

sometimes came back from the children's library in Newcastle without a single book. I'd scoured the shelves, trying book jacket after book jacket with frustrated intentness, and all the descriptions seemed to offer me worlds I already knew to the point of exhaustion" (Spufford 162). Like Mackey, "reading up," for Spufford took away the security of familiar titles and genres. The memories that linger are emotional reactions, which are not surprising considering the emotional rollercoaster "effective" reading takes us on. In Tatar's description of the strategies of memorable children's literature she states, "Favoring expressive intensity over intellectual heft, the books of childhood use no-holds-barred melodramatic strategies until we are under their spell. We can all remember the jolts and shimmer of books we read as children, the moments that sent shivers up and down the spine" (Tatar 11).

Conclusion

As a looking glass, memoir writing opens doors to children's bedrooms, which house our fears and desires. While Sullivan's bedroom reveals a longing for her parents, Spufford's contains memories of his sister's death, an unforgettable scene in childhood. Contrary to this distinct moment he writes, "Among these drifting pillars, the true story of my life looks no different; it is just a story among stories" from which he can "hardly tell anymore which is [his] own" (Spufford 210). While rereading for Spufford became disorienting, moments like his memory of Piglet temporarily blanket the darkness. For Sullivan, "The story has not lost its spell" (Sullivan 292). She writes, "I am still Paul, I am still Jane, the child lying in that bed reading that terrible book, thinking of how I loved my parents, how they are everything to me, how I always wanted them to come to my room to comfort me when I have bad dreams" (Sullivan 292). Spufford, Sullivan, and Mackey ride magic broomsticks back to childhood

through voice, narration and emotional connections to childhood stories even when their adult brains resisted. Rereading reveals the extent to which our growth, and stability, is rooted in stories stacked on shelves. Ideally, "Childhood stories align the imagination with memory so that all parts of the self, past and present, feel connected and coherent" (Natov 187). While Spufford loses himself in stories, his memoir draws an arch in development. Memoir writing and storytelling have worked in tandem to transform these memoirists upon each rereading and expose parts of the self that remained hidden. Tatar writes, "Curious, energetic, and enthralled, those bookworms have earned the right to a metamorphosis, one that captures the magic and drama of what happens to them when they read powerful, breathtaking stories" (Tatar 27). While Krips explains that, "few adults would want to return to childhood as it was actually lived, with all its unremembered difficulties, humiliations and problems," all three memoirists capture the instability of childhood, which is an "honorable and difficult artistic ambition" (Krips 16; Mackey 198). These memoirs consider rereading and memoir writing as a way to journey in old age and perhaps, resist the progression of time; Sullivan ends where she began, analyzing the story of Psyche. The kinds of desires that books fulfilled include the ability to travel and transform, even if to another child's room, and the ability to feel diverse emotions. Mackey hopes that her self-study will help us better understand another child's literacy. These memoirs have endorsed reading in childhood, for all its unexpected twists and turns, and the diverseness of literacy experiences, even for childhoods of the same era. Ending in childhood, Spufford, Mackey, and Sullivan conclude as open books, with the rest of their lives and stories yet to be imagined.

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