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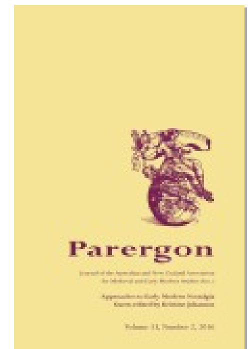

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Memories of childhood seldom appear in early modern life writing, and nostalgia is not a primary mode of recollection. Where childhood does figure, it is often troubled: difficult memories, of loss, death, and displacement, make themselves insistently felt. However, nostalgia registers not only idealisation, but also a sense of connection to a continuingly resonant past. This article considers the representation of childhood memory in six seventeenth-century narratives, examining how these texts negotiate a relation to the past, and tracing elements of the emotional structures of nostalgia in early modern subjects.

Nostalgia begins as a desire for home, conceived of as a physical location from which the sufferer has departed.[1] For Johannes Hofer, the term's originator in the late seventeenth century, it described the suffering of travellers (chiefly Alpine soldiers) separated from their place of origin, who pined for the lands they had left behind.[2] Quite early in its short but intensively studied history, however, the object of nostalgic longing moves from lost place to lost time. By the late eighteenth century, Jean Starobinski notes, Kant had observed that 'what a person wishes to recover is not so much the actual *place* where he passed his childhood but his youth itself', a desire no physical return can satisfy.[3] As the concept moves into the modern era, this sense of nostalgia has become dominant: temporality increasingly displaces geography. In another significant shift, too, nostalgia is transformed from organic disorder to emotion, and the initial emphasis on the pain of separation is qualified with an element of pleasure in recollection. Nostalgia becomes a bittersweet emotion,

[1] I am very grateful to a number of people for help with an article which needed a lot of rewriting. Thanks to the anonymous *Parergon* reviewers, for comprehensive, well-judged, but nonetheless encouraging, criticisms, which enabled me to return to the article with a much clearer sense of what it should be about. Thanks also to Elspeth Graham and Jeni Williams, both of whom made characteristically astute, perceptive, and helpful comments at very short notice. Finally, thanks to Kristine Johanson and Anne Scott for their thoughtful and patient editorial work at various points in this process.

[2] See Johannes Hofer, *Dissertatio medica de nostalgia, oder Heimwehe* (Basel: Jacobus Bertschius, [1688]); and for the English translation, Carolyn Kiser Anspach, trans., 'Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia by Johannes Hofer, 1688', *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine*, 2 (1934), 376–91. For a rigorous discussion of Hofer's thesis, see Alex Davis's article in this issue.

[3] Jean Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia', trans. William S. Kemp, *Diogenes*, 54 (1966), 81–103 (p. 94).

rather than a disease that can lead to death, and is characterised above all as a poignant yearning for an unattainable and often idealised time past.[4]

Nostalgia in this more recent sense is understood above all in relation to the modern era, as the affliction of an age disconnected from history. But where does this leave nostalgia in the premodern or indeed early modern period? Are people nostalgic before the word is invented? In one sense, obviously, yes: Hofer is describing something he sees, that pre-exists its naming. Moreover, the emotions that come together in the modern concept of nostalgia are ancient: banishment, homesickness, a bittersweet pleasure in remembering a lost past, yearning for past glories; all are recorded as far back as Homer.[5] We may want to preserve something specific about nostalgia as a constellation of all these together, and to identify the moment of its origin as significant, but its constituent parts can be explored before the concept comes into being.

However, the place of childhood as one of those constituent parts is more complex. Childhood today is often seen as the natural object of nostalgic emotion. Since the late eighteenth century, childhood has often been imagined as a time of idyllic innocence, and the passing of childhood as a loss. But early modern perspectives on the child are very different. Original sin has a clear reality in the nature of children, who are widely assumed to be greedy, vain, impertinent, lazy, disobedient, and deceitful, and these natural characteristics must be quashed. Early modern recollections of childhood register this sense of sin forcefully. Richard Norwood, for instance, comments approvingly on his parents' 'severe disposition and carriage towards me suitable to that mass of sin and folly which was bound up in my heart'.[6] Elizabeth Isham takes for granted that childishness itself is in some sense a sin; her 'natureall Stubbernes of a Childe to my mother' is in fact 'towards thee my God, whome I dissobayed in my parents'.[7] To look back on childhood with nostalgia as a time of happy irresponsibility is seldom an option.

[4] The history of nostalgia is summarised in Starobinski, 'Idea of Nostalgia'; see also Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2015). For an overview of the extensive literature on nostalgia, see the special issue of *Memory Studies*, 3.3 (2010), 'Nostalgia and the Shapes of History', eds Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies.

[5] See Nicholas Dames, 'Nostalgia and Its Disciplines', *Memory Studies*, 3.3 (2010), 269–75 (p. 269).

[6] Richard Norwood, *The Journal of Richard Norwood, Surveyor of Bermuda*, eds Wesley Frank Cravan and Walter B. Hayward (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1945), p. 5.

[7] Elizabeth Isham, 'Booke of Rememberance' (*c.* 1639), fol. 3[r–v]. Quotations are taken from transcripts of the manuscript, published as part of Elizabeth Clarke and Erica Longfellow's, *Constructing Elizabeth Isham 1609–1654* (2008) online at <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/projects/isham/>.

Early modern life writing also tends to be structurally inimical to the positioning of childhood as a site of lost happiness. Spiritual autobiography, the dominant form of life writing at the time, has an anti-nostalgic trajectory: the self progresses from darkness and spiritual misery to a state of redemption and joy, and childhood belongs to the years of darkness. Moreover, childhood does not occupy the same place in terms of the narrative of selfhood more generally. The construction of identity is not primarily grounded in infancy, parenting styles, or deeply felt childhood experiences. Childhood events are significant in so far as they foreshadow future preferences and pathways, demonstrate enduring characteristics, or illustrate God's providential intent; childhood is remembered primarily in order to identify and reflect on sin.[8] There is not much space for a pleasurable dwelling on the past in all this.

In this article, I consider a number of seventeenth-century autobiographies to ask how the writers look back on and remember childhood, and whether we can identify a nostalgic relation to childhood in their narratives. To explore seventeenth-century autobiography through the concept of nostalgia is necessarily anachronistic; these are writings that predate even Hofer's version of the concept, never mind subsequent elaborations. Accordingly, my aim is not to argue that these narratives demonstrate the pre-existence of nostalgia for childhood in the seventeenth century. If anything, not least for the reasons outlined above, they might suggest the opposite. Childhood is generally dealt with briskly, and pleasure is not the dominant emotion communicated. But if the correlation of memory and painful (or bittersweet) emotion focused on childhood is not in itself precisely nostalgic, it may suggest something similar; a kind of proto-nostalgia, perhaps.

Rather than an idealised version of the past, of the kind that has often been attributed to childhood memories, I take nostalgia in a broader sense to evoke a structure of emotional and memorial patterns; a desire to dwell on the past that is both painful and pleasurable, and a sense of unfinished emotion (like memory, nostalgia could be seen as a past that refuses to let go). Nostalgia as an emotional pattern can attach even to childhoods that are far from idyllic, where remembered sorrow is in itself a compelling point of return; this is still the case in contemporary autobiography.[9] Childhood, for the writers I discuss, may not have been particularly happy, but the desire to

[8] For further discussion on this point, see Katharine Hodgkin, 'Elizabeth Isham's Everlasting Library: Memory and Self in Early Modern Autobiography', in *History and Psyche: Culture, Psychoanalysis, and the Past*, eds Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 241–64.

[9] For discussion of nostalgia and trauma as modes in contemporary autobiography, see Kate Douglas, *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma and Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

recollect it is still there. The mere fact of recording the details of childhood, indeed, in a genre where they are not as a rule expected, could be seen to register continuing emotional resonance. Nostalgia for childhood may also be for the child self who has not yet suffered a breach, who had no reason yet to envisage loss. Childhood in these accounts retains its grasp on the adult, in the context of loss and regret both for a past world and for a past self.

I. The Texts

The six autobiographical narratives discussed here, five English and one Welsh, are accounts which in one way or another register a complex sense of childhoods lost. The lives they record are spread across the seventeenth century, though most were written in the middle decades. Although diverse in terms of class, gender, and form, all but one are broadly religious in orientation, focusing on the spiritual lives of their authors (whether Anglican or associated with separatist churches). Four of the six are in manuscript rather than print, which highlights a broader divide: manuscript autobiographies are often much longer and more detailed than published texts, and offer more scope for personal detail. Most published autobiographies were printed under the auspices of a religious group, and were often relatively standardised in style and content. Childhood is more likely to appear where authors had more authority over their narrative.

As the predominance of manuscript also indicates, most of these accounts are written for a small and select audience. Two authors wrote explicitly with family readers in mind. Elizabeth Isham (1608–54), a single woman from a prominent Northamptonshire family, left a long manuscript narrative called 'Booke of Rememberance', dated 1639,[10] explaining that it was intended for her brother's children, and Thomas Shepard (1605–49), who emigrated to New England and became a prominent Puritan minister, wrote his narrative, 'My Birth and Life',[11] for his eldest and only surviving son, Thomas. Richard Norwood (1590–1675), the first surveyor of Bermuda, wrote his 'Confessions'[12] at the age of forty-nine; worried that age was making him forget things, he was anxious to remember (notably God's mercies), without any mention of a possible audience. Edward Barlow (1643–1705), the last born of this group, was also the only one to come from a background of extreme poverty. A seaman, he began keeping a journal at thirty-one, when

[10] See n. 7, above.

[11] Thomas Shepard, 'Autobiography', in *God's Plot: The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety, Being the Autobiography and Journal*, ed. Michael McGiffert (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972).

[12] See n. 6, above.

his ship had been captured, and in this period of enforced idleness, he wrote a narrative of his life from childhood to the present. He continued to keep the journal throughout his life, leaving a very long manuscript for an audience vaguely designated as his 'friends'.[13] The two published accounts, meanwhile, are part of the surge in spiritual autobiography in the middle and later seventeenth century. Sarah Davy (*c.* 1635–67) was a Baptist whose spiritual narrative, 'The Record of my Consolations, and the Meditations of my Heart', was published after her death under the auspices of her church; such texts were generally aimed at fellow-believers.[14] Arise Evans (1607–60) was alone in targeting a wide readership. A well-known prophet of the revolutionary years who published a number of visionary and polemical works, his autobiographical account, 'The Narration of the Life, Calling, and Visions of Arise Evans', was a section in a longer prophetic text, published in 1653.[15]

In this group of four men and two women, the geographical mobility of the men is striking. From Wales, Lancashire, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, to London, Bermuda, New England, and all around the world, their lives were shaped by dramatic departures, separating them for long periods, if not forever, from both the places and the people they grew up with. The homeland in a literal sense is left behind. The women's lives are, not surprisingly, far more bounded, and people rather than place are the primary markers of loss. Isham, in contrast to the male writers, consistently refuses departure: her place is the family home, and her writing commemorates the lives and deaths of her grandmother, mother, and sister, recreating the lost home they shared. Davy mentions place not at all (except in relation to going or not going to church), although her background was French. Her life story too is shaped around family deaths, but for her the centrality of the spiritual narrative to a large degree excludes the material world.

It is not only in women's stories, of course, that death has a central place; both men and women lose mothers, fathers, siblings. The reshaping of the world of childhood that follows from these deaths is evident. Sorrow, anger, regret, and disappointment emerge in accounts of the deaths themselves, and also of their wider consequences, notably financial loss and social displacement.[16]

[13] Edward Barlow, *Barlow's Journal of his Life at Sea in King's Ships, East and West Indiamen & Other Merchantmen from 1659 to 1703*, ed. Basil Lubbock, 2 vols (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1934).

[14] Sarah Davy, *Heaven realized, or, The Holy pleasure of daily intimate communion with God* ([London?], 1670).

[15] Arise Evans, *An Eccho to the Book, called A Voyce from Heaven* (London, 1653).

[16] See Margaret Spufford, 'First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers', *Social History*, 4 (1979),

Along with deaths, they write of harsh treatment from both parents and stepparents; poverty, struggle, work; conflict over schooling, behaviour, and choice of life path; anxiety about spiritual condition. All are unusual in offering both some description of childhood experiences and also some degree of emotional intensity in the account of those experiences of intimacy and loss, belonging and displacement. Deaths, departures, impoverishment, sickness, and happiness thus provide a set of terms through which to explore childhood memories in these writings. And if these writers seldom reflect explicitly on their emotions about childhood, we can nonetheless read in the meticulous detail with which they reconstruct the past a continuing and complex sense of connection with what remains present and pressing in memory, suggesting that they are wrestling with a problem of distance. It is in this that we may identify the elements of a nostalgic relation to childhood.

II. A 'forlorne child': Remembering the Dead

Death is a common experience in early modern families. Parents lose children; children lose parents and siblings; spouses die, and remarriages follow. Whatever the impact of these deaths on the living, it is clear that the genre of spiritual autobiography constrains the possible frames within which they may be recounted: death is understood in the context of the spiritual journey. Grief at the loss of parents and siblings is natural, but excessive grief or anger (whether in the dying or in the survivors) suggests a failure to be reconciled to God's will. This context shapes the emotional register in which loss is articulated. The stories of death in these narratives are often curiously muted or ambivalent. Submission to God's will, along with an insistence on the virtues of the dead, is in tension with grief and anger, and memories which may not always conform to the ideal.

For Thomas Shepard, who lost both parents as a child, memory is fragmentary and uncertain: 'I do well remember my father and have some little remembrance of my mother.' Writing in New England in the 1640s, his account aims to establish his parents as virtuous and loving. His father 'was a wise, prudent man the peacemaker of the place'; his mother was 'a woman much afflicted in conscience sometimes even to distraction of mind, yet was sweetly recovered again before she died and I being the youngest she did bear exceeding great love to me and made many prayers for me'.[17] But these early memories are displaced by troubles. At three, he was sent to stay with his grandparents (where he was 'much neglected') to escape an outbreak of

407–35. Spufford estimates that as many as one eighth of children may have lost their fathers by the age of seven, with both financial and psychological impacts.

[17] Shepard, 'Autobiography', p. 38.

plague. By the time he returned, his mother was dead, and his father had a new wife who showed him 'the difference between my own mother and a stepmother; she … incensed my father often against me; it may be that it was justly for my childishness'. His schoolteacher meanwhile was 'exceeding curst and cruel', and his father died when he was ten.[18] Summoning up the early tenderness of his mother, then, gives him brief access to a version of himself as loved and happy, in comparison to the years of harsh treatment and anger that followed.

Within the frame of the spiritual autobiography, these recollections of suffering prepare the ground for Shepard's eventual redemption (an elder brother takes him on and sends him to university). But while this determined providentialism attempts to shore up the idea that all was for the best, his qualifiers and afterthoughts register the struggle of that effort: 'yet' his mother was well enough to make a good death and assert her love for him as she died; 'it may be' that his father's fury was just, because he was childish. Shepard's description of his father as wise and a peacemaker is in tension with his own experience of him as angry and misled by his wife. These memories of the distracted and early dead mother, the harsh stepmother, the incensed and also dead father, suggest not only loss but also injustice and uncertainty, despite the pious framing. In this case, dwelling on childhood suggests unresolved grief and resentment, rather than nostalgia. If there is a pleasurable moment here, it can only be the faint and troubled recollections of his life before the age of three.

Arise Evans, by contrast, is unusual in recalling his early childhood as a time of happiness, founded in his father's love and delight in him. His father was 'a sufficient Man of the Parish' who could recite his genealogy for ten generations, in the Welsh tradition, and Arise was a promising and precocious child: 'because I was so young and so active in learning, all concluded that God had designed me for some great worke.'[19] But his life as admired and beloved youngest son is cut short:

> in the midst of my jollity a Cloud comes over me, death takes away my father before I was seaven years old, and now he forgets me at his death, that was his delight a little before; and making his last Will, he leaves a Portion to all his children by Name, and to many of his kindred, some a farre off, for he did abound in riches; but I was not so much as mentioned in his Will, neither any thing left for mee, so that I came soon to know the folly of vaine confidence in men; and now my brethren who afore envied me began to glory over mee, saying, I had nothing to do among them, and

[18] Shepard, 'Autobiography', p. 38.

[19] Evans, *An Eccho*, p. 1.

> what was I but a begger: and many wondred at it, and pitied me, saying, had my Father forgot me his darling?[20]

The shift into the present tense reanimates the injury: 'he forgets me.' The omission is still incomprehensible decades later: there is no way of reconciling his conviction that he had been his father's darling, and the fact that he was not named in the will. The generalisation about 'the folly of vaine confidence in men' can hardly bridge the gap between the generous and indulgent father of his early youth and the father who rejects and abandons him to poverty, 'tossed from place to place to do any drudgery, as a forlorne child, that had no right to any thing belonging to my deceased father'.[21] If the opening of his narrative asserts the intangible inheritance of genealogy as a descent from father to son, the absence of any literal inheritance leaves him deprived of rights and identity, and cuts off mourning. He grieves at the lost promise of his childhood, but as an adult his strongest emotional tie is not to his father's house, but to the mystical landscape of his later childhood.

For Sarah Davy, the key losses are of mother and brother rather than father, and her brief account of her childhood is dominated by bodily sickness and by loss. Her mother died when she was about eleven, something she records twice, in almost identical form ('About the 11. Year of my Age, the Lord was pleased to take away my dear Mother', at the opening of her narrative; and three pages later, 'About the same Year of my Age the Lord was pleased to take away my dear mother').[22] Repetition of this rigorously self-denying formula emphasises her reliance on God's pleasure. Death is God's will, and the bereaved child must accept this; grief is subordinated to God's support. Despite her 'great loss', she explains, 'knowing it was my duty to trust God at all times I laboured therefore to be content and the Lord was pleased to bear me up'.[23] Since parental love is defined in relation to godly up-bringing ('my Parents were very dear and tender of me and did not leave me without instructions of the things of God') the resolution of grief through acceptance of God's will becomes a means to preserve the connection to the lost parent.[24]

But God's pleasure and God's will can also be terrifyingly responsive to a lack of godliness, as Davy illustrates in the death of her brother:

> I remember on a time a little Brother of mine was sick and my Mother being very tender of her Child, one Lords day would not go to Church,

[20] Evans, *An Eccho*, p. 2.

[21] Evans, *An Eccho*, p. 3.

[22] Davy, *Heaven realized*, pp. 1, 4.

[23] Davy, *Heaven realized*, p. 4.

[24] Davy, *Heaven realized*, p. 2.

> which caused me also to stay at home, but wanting employment, out of my Mothers sight went to work about my babies, at night the Lord was pleased to take a way the Child I standing by the Cradle, which brought a fear upon me presently that I had been the cause, by my working that day, of the Lords anger in taking away my brother.[25]

That her baby brother should die as she stood over him is directly linked in her mind to her secretly playing with dolls on the Sabbath: his death is her punishment. Even as an adult, it is by no means clear to her that she was not culpable. 'I also remember that I went out and wept bitterly, in the consideration of my days work', she writes, but she kept silence and told no one of her guilt: 'I was much troubled at it, but hoped such was the ignorance of my heart that all would be well again by my praying and going to Church.'[26] Her mother's death in the same year underlines the link between her sin and the deaths of others.

On the other hand, her mother's death is followed by her own recovery from the ill health that had afflicted her before. During her mother's life, she says, she was 'sickly and weak … which made my Mother the more tender of me'. This tenderness made her 'more sensible of my great loss' when her mother died, 'but', she continues, 'such was the goodness of God that he was pleased then wholy to take away my distemper'.[27] The psychic patterns here are troubled. Mothers are tender of their sickly children; to be sickly is to be loved; but love is risky, since God, a more distant and ferocious parental figure, punishes sin with death. God is good, and it pleases him to 'take away' first her brother, then her mother, then her sickliness. There is no clear way out of these emotional webs. She is at fault, the cause of the death of her brother, yet she is the one who survives and is made healthy.

Davy's retrospect on her childhood thus emphasises loss and guilt, rather than happiness. Even if the narrative reaches back to a time before death, when she had a loving mother and a live little brother, it cannot dwell on this as a time of nostalgic happiness, for it is only through loss that she survives to come to God herself. As with Shepard and Evans, both the conventions of spiritual narrative and the need to understand one's life as shaped by divine providence shut down the nostalgic impulse in these accounts of death. The imagined happy child cannot explicitly be the object of yearning, because grief and disappointment are God's will and part of spiritual growth.

[25] Davy, *Heaven realized*, p. 2.

[26] Davy, *Heaven realized*, p. 2.

[27] Davy, *Heaven realized*, p. 4.

III. Mother's Milk: Leaving the Country of Childhood

Memories of childhood are closely intertwined with memories of place; this facilitates the transformation of geographical into chronological yearning. But leaving home at an early age was a common experience in seventeenth-century England, for all ranks and both sexes. Apprenticeships, service, or paid employment began for many around age eleven. Even in wealthier families, the custom of sending children to be raised in other households meant that it was common to live away from home while still in the early teens. And mobility increased into young adulthood; the pressures of poverty and unemployment led both sexes to travel in search of work, and military and trading adventures took young men in particular overseas. Local identities remained strong, however, and place was a central component of identity. Differences – of language or dialect, work, customs and traditions, food and drink – marked out the regions of Britain, especially for the poor; and those who travelled were often defined by place of origin.

Leaving home is thus both a literal reality for many and a potent metaphor for the end of childhood, and it often figures in life stories. Departure for some was eagerly sought after. This is particularly true of Edward Barlow, the son of a poor labourer in Lancashire who spent most of his life at sea. Restlessness for Barlow is a defining characteristic, setting him apart from his neighbours.[28] He had always 'a mind to hear … people tell of their travels and of strange things in other countries, and of their manners, and … to see fashions', he explains, but because of his family's poverty he 'was forced to go to work' at casual labouring from an early age, and at twelve or thirteen was placed with a master at a local trade he disliked. Refusing to stay in this place, however, despite his parents' urging, he eventually managed by a series of complex financial operations to raise enough money to make his way to London.[29]

Barlow's account of his departure from home and family underlines his separation from the place of childhood and family. Telling nobody of his intentions, he simply sets out:

> So coming down the stairs, my mother and one of my sisters being in the house and not knowing my intent, marvelled to see me put on my clothes that day. Passing by them, not staring at all, I bid them farewell and came out of the house. … when I was gotten almost out of call, my mother

[28] For an illuminating discussion of Barlow's restlessness, see Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Fumerton identifies him as an instance of 'unsettled subjectivity', disconnected from enduring work or family connections, moving from one ship and master to another, without fixed loyalties or points of intimacy.

[29] Barlow, *Journal*, i, 15.

Figure 1

Edward Barlow leaves his mother's house in the wheatfield

Source: Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, JOD/4:
'Journal of Edward Barlow, 1659–1703', plate from volume 1

© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (Image reference: B1686-004)

> came out, and seeing that I did intend to go, called to me in the manner you see here drawn, beckoning her hand to come again, and willing me not to go I could not tell whither, and if I would go, to stay till my father came home and see what he would say to it. Yet with all her persuasions she could not entreat me to stay.[30]

Alongside his account of this abrupt departure, he places perhaps the most striking of the many pictures illustrating his manuscript: his mother calling him back (see Figure 1). She stands by the house with her hand raised, surrounded by wheat fields, and he stands on the edge of the picture looking back; but he does not return, and the gap is not closed.[31]

In both words and picture, Barlow defines his difference through his ability to leave the maternal sphere behind him. His neighbours, by contrast,

[30] Barlow, *Journal*, I, 20–21.

[31] As Fumerton (*Unsettled*, p. 64) points out, the visual image reinforces the narrative of separation; if anything, indeed, the momentousness of the departure is more clearly marked in the picture than in the text.

> would not venture a day's journey from out the smoke of their chimneys or the taste of their mother's milk; not even upon the condition that they might eat and drink of as good cheer as the best nobleman in the land, but they would rather stay at home and eat a brown crust and drink a little whey.[32]

Mother's milk, for Barlow, is like brown crusts and whey, the food of poverty and limited horizons; his appetites draw him elsewhere. But the bread of his country remains a potent image. The last thing he does before his departure is visit the bakehouse 'to fetch a ganake, a loaf of bread, which we call so'.[33] Twenty years after leaving, the local language is still his language, and he speaks as 'we'.

Food, in plenty, in lack, and in its social meanings, is a recurrent preoccupation for Barlow. Mother's bread and milk are not enough for him, and food also plays an important part in his account of his decision not to stay with the local cloth bleacher ('whitester') to whom he is apprenticed. He resents the 'great difference of victuals' between 'the upper end of the table', where master, dame, and their children ate 'pudding with suet and plums' and 'a piece of fat beef', while at the lower end, the servants and apprentices had pudding with only melted butter, and 'a piece of sorloine next to the horns'. The inequality of distribution, rather than the quality of the food, is what rankles: 'there was always something or other which we had not.'[34] Here again the desire for travel is narratively linked to eating. When his parents, accustomed to food shortages, told him that so long as the food was enough to live on he had no grounds for complaint, he acknowledges that though

> sometimes coarse, yet it might serve any ordinary man to live by; and many times since I could have wished for the worst bit of it. But that would not content me at that time, for my mind being given to places more remote I could not settle myself to stay.[35]

Impelled forward by a radical dissatisfaction, Barlow will not be an ordinary man; his travels will bring him both plenty and want. Departure from home is departure from the place of nourishment and mother's milk, to find new ways of feeding.

Barlow's connections between food, home, and maternity provide an oblique link to the Swiss soldiers diagnosed by Hofer, who suffered from the loss of maternal nourishment and familiar flavours. As Starobinski summarises

[32] Barlow, *Journal*, i, 21.

[33] Barlow, *Journal*, i, 20. The first part of his journal, the narrative of his childhood and youth, was written in the early 1670s.

[34] Barlow, *Journal*, i, 18.

[35] Barlow, *Journal*, i, 19.

Hofer, 'It is hard for them to forget the loving care with which their mothers surrounded them. They miss the soups which they used to have for breakfast, the thick milk from their own valley'; effectively, as he goes on to gloss, 'the loss of childhood, of "oral satisfactions", of motherly coaxing'.[36] Barlow's rejection of the food of the motherland – milk, ganake – might suggest that nostalgia is not his problem. He has turned his back on motherly coaxing. And indeed, having left Lancashire, he returns only twice, finally retiring to London. But the level of detail with which he recalls these early experiences indicates a continuing emotional pull: there is something here that he needs to work through, to recapture. The careful enumeration of exactly what he was paid, who ate what, how he arranged his plans and managed his departure, along with the compelling image of his mother standing by the house and calling him back as he leaves, map out a landscape of memory that still ties him to the long-abandoned home country.

If Barlow's links between maternity, place, and food could be seen to echo the nostalgic preoccupations of the alpine sufferers, Arise Evans offers a different link, through the mountainous geography of his Welsh homeland which becomes a symbolic landscape of dream and prophecy. Paternal loss and rejection are counterbalanced by a move into the high places of the mountains, following his mother's remarriage, which took them to live in Maisellan Kaderis; and in this landscape of mystery and revelation, he finds his vocation as a prophet.[37] The mountains lift him up, both literally and spiritually. Crossing over the top of 'a high place called *Bwlch Ryw Credire*', and fearful of the 'darke Cloudes' and the swift winds, he fell to prayer, 'and through the fervency of my prayer, and vehemency of the wind and clouds I was lifted above the Earth, and carried up a space in the Clouds as I went on my way'.[38] A still more intense experience when he was around fourteen repeats this juxtaposition of prayer and the high places of the world as a means of spiritual elevation:

> I arose betimes on *Whitsunday* morning, and went up a hill at a place called Gole Ronnw to see the Sun arise: and seeing the Sun at its rising Skip, Play, Dance, and turne about like a wheele, I fell downe upon my Knees, lifting up mine Eyes, Hands, and Heart towards God; I cried, saying, O Lord most high, that hast made all things for thy glory, give mee Grace, Wisdome, and Understanding … You will say, these things are childish,

[36] Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia', p. 87.

[37] For explanation of the Welsh place names as Evans gives them, see Thomas N. Corns, 'Evans, Arise', *ODNB*: he was born near Abertawe (Barmouth), and 'Maisellan Kaderise' is identified as Maes-y-llan, a farmstead on the side of Cader Idris.

[38] Evans, *An Eccho*, pp. 5–6.

> foolish things; but I found … God hath a purpose to make me like his Sonne in opening the Mysteries of Scriptures.[39]

As God replaces his lost and disappointing father, Evans once again will become the child of promise who will explain mysteries.

The elucidation of mysteries is also his task in relation to the mountains themselves: mystical meaning is written into their names. '*Bwlch ryw credire* in *English is*, Believe ascend the gap', he explains, in marginal notes; 'Gole Ronnw in English is, they will give light'. These meanings in turn illuminate the political turmoil of the time:

> *on the right hand from the Gap is* Kader y du Ruse, *the highest hill in Brittain … its name in English signifies*, *Arise the House of Char: meaning* Charles. *On the left hand is the* Turre Mawre, *that in English is the great Towres, and signifieth the* Parliament.[40]

The language and the mountains of his childhood are the place of origin, to which his dreams and prophecies as an adult return.

The natural world, for Evans, is imbued with both emotional and symbolic meaning. His relationship with the mountains, indeed, evokes the Welsh concept of *hiraeth*, which signifies a longing for a lost home which cannot be regained; generally glossed today as the landscape of Wales, or Welshness itself.[41] Writing in English for an English audience, Evans does not refer to *hiraeth*, but it is a suggestive context for his identification with the landscape of dream and prophecy, which retains its force after he has grown up and travelled to London. Caught up in the political ferment of the time, and imprisoned in the Gatehouse in 1635, he returns to the mountains in trance:

> I seemed to be in *Merioneth* at *Maisellan kadder ruse* where I was brought up, and behold I was with my elder Brother by the river side, and it seemed to me a glorious day, and about two in the afternoon, on a sudden my Brother was gone, I knew not how nor where; and as I lifted up mine eyes again, the Sun by degrees became dark … at which darkness the *Sheep* did cry and run to seek shelter in the holes of the *rocks*, as they use to do in those parts, when a *darkness* comes before a storm; and all the light of heaven was *taken away*, that it became *so dark* as pitch.[42]

The landscape of mountain, river, rocks, is as vivid as ever: the sheep bleat and run about 'as they use to do', the weather is glorious, his brother is with

[39] Evans, *An Eccho*, pp. 6–7.

[40] Evans, *An Eccho*, pp. 5, 6.

[41] The word, now often translated as 'nostalgia' (or described as untranslatable), was in use from early medieval times onwards.

[42] Evans, *An Eccho*, p. 72.

him. This simultaneously offers a compelling image of nostalgic yearning, and almost cancels out nostalgia. If the lost landscape of childhood is not after all lost, but returns in vision with renewed meaning and purpose, then it cannot be the object of lost desire in a purely nostalgic way. Nor is it strictly lost: Evans returns every few years. Nonetheless, the emotional force of the place of childhood, and the urgency with which it lives in his adult consciousness, seem to 'correlate place, time and desire', as Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies have described the characteristic structure of nostalgia.[43] Arise Evans leaves the mountains and the people of North Wales, but the memories remain with him to drive his sense of destiny and compensate for his loss of both father and mountains.

IV. Stony Paths: Social Displacement

For Evans and Shepard, the father's death precipitates social dislocation: the promising son who was destined for education and achievement is suddenly impoverished and insecure. Richard Norwood undergoes a similar social and spatial displacement, but as a result of his father's financial difficulties, rather than death. His family's move from Berkhamsted to Stony Stratford, and his removal from school, is a rupture that leaves an enduring sense of loss and grievance. Childhood is a place of both yearning and resentment, as he dwells on the catastrophe that blasted his hopes.

Norwood's early years sound far from idyllic. His parents were severe; he dates one of his memories with the remark that he must have been seven or eight, as 'after that age my parents were so sharp and austere towards me that I think I durst not have been so bold with them' (he was drawing their attention to biblical passages that he thought they had not noticed).[44] In his twenties, his father still appears in nightmares, 'grievously angry with me'.[45] In passages subsequently deleted in the manuscript, he mentions an early schoolmaster who told his father not to bother putting much into his education, 'for I would not be fit or capable of it, and I standing by thought the same'; he had 'a dragging' which made speech slow and difficult; he thought himself 'the biggest blockhead in the school'.[46] These traces of early humiliations trail across his account and infect the present. But though his childhood sounds cheerless, with hindsight, it seems a time of hope and potential. At the opening of his account, a long digression on childhood piety

[43] Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies, 'Nostalgia and the Shapes of History: Editorial', *Memory Studies*, 3.3 (2010), 181–86 (p. 184).

[44] Norwood, *Journal*, p. 8.

[45] Norwood, *Journal*, p. 26.

[46] Norwood, *Journal*, p. 9.

reflects on early evidences of grace (though he constantly reminds himself that he was full of sin). His second schoolmaster, 'though I then thought him to be more sharp and severe towards me than to others', had his interests at heart and recognised his talents:

> he did affect me very tenderly, as was manifest by his frequent commendations of me in such companies where he had occasion to come … I had an aptness and readiness in versifying above the rest of my schoolfellows.[47]

And his removal from this school had a particularly bitter twist. The scholarship that had been negotiated for him, which would have allowed him to stay there as a boarder, was given to another boy instead, 'the remembrance whereof is even an abhorring unto me to this day'.[48] Forty years later, he still remembers vividly his sense of loss and resentment as he leaves the 'sharp' schoolmaster:

> when I knew I must shortly go from him I thought I would then be even with him, for I purposed then to carry myself very cheerfully without any sign of grief at departure, that so he might see I did not love him. But as the day drew nearer, qualms of grief and dismay began to seize on my heart, and much more when that woeful day was come and that my master called me aside, giving me good admonition, and I to take my leave of him and my fellows. Then my heart was ready to break and my eyes to gush abundantly with tears. And not without cause, for from that time forwards I went no more to school to any purpose, not meeting with an able schoolmaster and my father much decaying in his estate, but passed my time in a more fruitless and dissolute manner.[49]

This first description of his departure is repeated a few pages later, underlining its impact. The sense of hope snatched away, of promises broken, and injustice done, make the recollection still 'an abhorring'. His resentment at his schoolteacher's sharpness, his wish to get even by showing a lack of love, and his collapse into tears, likewise remain alive in his memory. The early version of himself – talented, spiritually inclined, with a teacher and neighbours who saw signs of grace in him – was lost in Stony Stratford, a town 'much given over to deboistness, to swaggering, brawling and fighting, to swearing and drunkenness'. Here he 'came not where there was any powerful ministry, neither had the society of any forward in religion'; he fell into acting and played the part of a woman on the stage; he led a 'stained' and dissolute life.[50]

[47] Norwood, *Journal*, p. 11.
[48] Norwood, *Journal*, p. 12.
[49] Norwood, *Journal*, pp. 5–6.
[50] Norwood, *Journal*, p. 14.

Norwood's tale of disappointment and loss – of status, education, and spiritual aspiration – also hints that it was his father's poor choices that blighted his future. At around the age of fifteen, education over, he was apprenticed to a fishmonger. For a boy whose father had 'been brought up from his youth as a gentleman', who had had a farm and perhaps been lord of the manor ('I remember I was present at a court kept there'), this was a severe comedown.[51] Norwood bitterly resents the narrowing horizons that go with his low-status apprenticeship.[52] His account demonstrates a child's uncertainty about what exactly had gone wrong, but there is a strong sense that his father was at fault:

> whether through his unskilfulness in that course of life [i.e., farming], or otherwise, I know not, but he had very great losses in sheep and otherwise. Whereupon he gave it over and came to Berkhampstead where he lived two years upon his means in a very fair house at great charge, but had little or nothing coming in, which moved him also to leave that.[53]

Early modern autobiographers almost never voice criticism of their parents, but this comes close. If the father had put his mind to raising money rather than living expensively on his capital, Norwood implies, the son would not have been snatched from the school and the teacher he loved, to follow a path of debauchery and low trades. Through his father's incompetence, he lost his place in the world.

In cases such as these, we may read a story of unreconciled loss that continues to demand the attention of the grown man who writes the story. There are injuries here that have not been forgiven, on some level, and that the writer continues to wrestle with (as the deletions also suggest). This is not idealisation, nor, indeed, dwelling on memory with pleasure; it is explicitly painful and abhorrent. Nostalgia, if it is to be found at all, is once again located in a time before the fall, and a yearning back towards that time; not necessarily as happy, but as a time of hope.

V. Delight in Memory: Nostalgia and the Refusal to Depart

If any early modern autobiography displays what we would now recognise as a nostalgic relation to the past, and to childhood in particular, it is that of Elizabeth Isham. More than a quarter of her autobiography is concerned with

[51] Norwood, *Journal*, p. 11.

[52] Cf. Spufford, 'First Steps in Literacy'. Potent emotions in autobiography are often roused by a sense of class displacement.

[53] Norwood, *Journal*, p. 11.

her childhood. She reconstructs with unparalleled detail and depth the family world she grew up in: her mother, father, and grandmother, her brother and sister, their relationships, their sicknesses, depressions, weaknesses, and (frequently) their deaths. By the time she writes her account, only she, her father, and her brother are left of this childhood world, and the intensity with which she reflects on and relives it underlines the loss. Her narrative is startlingly explicit about tensions (her jealousy of her siblings, her mother's excessive use of physical punishment, her small crimes and thefts) but at the same time the frame of spiritual development contains and interprets these failings by way of a Christian focus on sin as the foundation of the self. From this perspective, as for Sarah Davy, all sorrows represent her failures of gratitude for blessings, and to come to terms with sorrow is to learn how it is in reality a means to grow closer to God.

Retrospection for Isham is primarily a pleasurable activity. 'I have observed', she reflects, 'that many in age have delighted to talke of things done in there Youth. [T]he rememberance hereof I have found so profitable that me thinkes my Youth is renued'.[54] She takes pleasure in reliving the past and recalling the dead, contemplating the intimacy between herself and her grandmother or her sister, in a quiet world of needlework, reading, and prayer. She refers repeatedly to 'delight', and to activities she loved: sewing ('I know not what jenius led me to love it so well'), ballads ('I delighted so much in ballets that I could say many by hart', though the context is her father's annoyance at her failure to learn the catechism), or, when her siblings were ill, keeping company with her grandmother 'who said she would part with me no more':

> neyther did I desire it having so good company of her (and her bookes but especially I delighted in hearing her maide read when I was in bed ... I well remember that I never delighted in any thing or booke or nothing was so pleasant to mee, so much as in the holy histories of the Olde and new testament in the bible: and now freshly commeth into my mind the delight I tooke long before this; in hearing one maide relate to another which could not read ... these things which my selfe had not till then knowen.[55]

The cluster of pleasures here – her grandmother's love, being in bed, hearing stories – is enhanced by the pleasure of the further memories sparked by this recollection, again associated with hearing stories of the Bible.

Memory underpins her faith. Framing the act of remembering as an occasion for spiritual lessons, Isham can accommodate memories of her

[54] Isham, 'Booke of Rememberance', fol. 38r. She was in fact only in her late thirties when she wrote her narrative.

[55] Isham, 'Booke of Rememberance', fol. 14r.

faults within the structure of renewal and self-improvement. But memory also exceeds the spiritual boundaries and tasks she allots to it, becoming compulsively detailed and at times disordered. The intensity with which she relives her early life in the pages of her book is a reminder that the past cannot be easily surmounted. A year after her sister's death, she is gripped by memory; 'the too strict bond of nature', the recollection of 'humane conversation', and 'naturall affection' impede her acceptance of God's will and produce instead an identification with the dead:

> tho I had somtimes passified my selfe with thinking she was out of her misery in joy … a conceit came into my mind which feed my malancolly humer that I might die at the same time or day of the yere that she did. >and that I might lie by her …< … at the very same day or night ensuing I was so ill that I could not rest … a paine in my side tooke me that I was hardly able to goe or stand.[56]

The physical re-enactment of death might also evoke the dangers of nostalgia, reminding us of its origins as a physical disorder: to dwell too much in the past can imperil the body in the present.

Memory as a threat to the emotional and bodily integrity of the self is connected to the idea of nostalgia as sickness. Held by the past, the nostalgic is unable to make change in the present. For Isham, though, the past seems to hold her in place for good as much as for ill. While she is tenacious in keeping alive in memory what she has lost, nostalgic memory could be said to galvanise her: she records her memories and she makes use of them for her spiritual progress. Pleasurable recollection is both consolation and moral lesson.

VI. Conclusion

Childhood in early modern thought and experience is in many ways strange to us, dominated by anxieties about sin, guilt, death, and poverty, rather than culturally positioned as a time of innocence and the capacity for joy. The writers discussed here do not look back on childhood as a time of pleasure and innocence. They do, however, articulate a sense of loss and separation tied to the memory of childhood. The dynamic of childhood interrupted by loss, and especially of uncertain and troubled parenting, is recurrently present in these narratives. The narrative structure that pivots on a moment of loss and fall necessarily implies a time before, a time when things were better, or at least could be imagined as having potential to go otherwise (if the father or

[56] Isham, 'Booke of Rememberance', fol. 33^{r}.

mother had not died, if the money had not been lost), before the childhood world and self were fractured.

But children emerge into subjectivity through the experience of loss, and children now as well as then experience obscure anxieties and fears, even if these are no longer focused to the same degree on sin and death. The loss of childhood, indeed, is something all adults have in common. If Barlow's mother's milk and Evans's mountains suggestively evoke the terrain of the maternal and the mountainous, what is significant here is less the pleasing metaphorical resonance with Hofer's definition than the highlighting of these primary elements in the constitution of the self (food, place, primary relationships) which cannot be held on to, nor easily put aside.

Nostalgia even in its contemporary usages is not necessarily fixed on a glamorised version of the past, so much as simply on the past. It signifies an unassuageable longing, a powerful connection with a lost time and place. In so far as nostalgia invests the act of remembering with emotion, not only the object of memory, even painful memories are capable of being the object of nostalgic recollection. And while pleasure may not be the right word, the intensity and precision with which these writers recall their emotions or their actions at particular moments suggest a kind of satisfaction in the act of recollection here, as well as a difficulty in relinquishing the past. The configurations of memory, place, and loss located in childhood that can be read in these narratives suggest that the emotional structures associated with nostalgia predate the naming of the concept. Nostalgia, whether for childhood or for other lost pasts, does not have the same meaning in early modern culture as it has today, and does not occupy so central a place. But childhood, irreducible signifier of the self in time, remains an object of troubled, and perhaps nostalgic, desire.

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